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Ralph had scarcely begun to climb when the moose
was under the birch.

WHEN LIGHTHOUSES ARE DARK

A Story of a Lake Superior Island

BY
ETHEL CLAIRE BRILL



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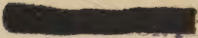
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LOCAL AUTHORS


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Ralph had scarcely begun to climb when the moose was
under the birch *Frontispiece*

The fog was so dense that Margaret could scarcely
distinguish Ralph *facing 4*

Ralph realized that this beast was manœuvering to head
them off *facing 228*

Lying in the snow was the ragged, wild-looking
man *facing 240*

I

LOST IN THE FOG

“IT’S getting thinner all right.”

Since the afternoon before, a thick curtain of fog, wrapped about the little boat, had shut out land, water and sky. On a perfect October day, bright, still and unusually warm, Lawrence Kingsley and his friends, Margaret, Ralph and Jack Elliot, had left the Canadian town of Fort William to visit an island a few miles out in Thunder Bay. When, late in the afternoon, they had started back, the weather was still fine, though a light haze had begun to whiten the blue of the sky, and dim the brightness of the lowering sun. The haze had thickened with surprising speed. Before they had gone a half mile, the fog had blotted out the island behind them, and, in a few minutes more, was so dense that Margaret, in the stern, could scarcely distinguish Ralph in the bow.

They had no compass, and, though Ralph tried to keep a straight course, he soon lost all sense of direction. The voices of the fog horns at the lighthouse stations seemed to come from any and

every quarter, while the whistles of steamers, feeling their way through the bay, added to his bewilderment. Those steamers were the chief danger. In a collision with even a tug, the tiny launch would have little chance. Once indeed she came so perilously close to a large boat that, though nothing was to be seen, the throbbing of the machinery was plainly audible, and the launch was tossed about and nearly swamped in the swell.

Lawrence, running the engine, did not dare to make speed. Through the dense, muffling whiteness, the little boat crept forward, her crew with eyes and ears strained for shape or sound of danger. The shore seemed to have vanished utterly, swallowed up in the fog. The coming of night made little difference. The fog had already completely blotted out the world.

As the hoarse tones of the horns grew fainter and fainter, Ralph turned the steering wheel in an endeavor to keep them within hearing. He was afraid of being carried out of the bay to the open stretches of Lake Superior. At no time, however, was he sure of the location of the horns, and finally he lost them altogether.

The water was smooth, with only a long, slow, gentle swell. There was scarcely a breath of breeze to stir the fog curtain. Though the boys had no idea where they were bound, Lawrence still kept the motor going at low speed, for to drift without

control was to increase the danger of running on the rocks.

On and on went the launch through a night that seemed interminable. With his head pillowed in his sister's lap and a rug tucked around him, little Jack fell asleep, but for the others sleep was impossible. They did not talk much. A strange feeling had come over them, the feeling of being utterly alone in a world empty of everything but mist and water. The damp chilled them, the silence and emptiness stupefied their minds, yet they remained awake and with one sense, hearing, curiously alert for the slightest sound.

At last the whitening of the mist about them indicated dawn. They had just begun to realize that day was actually coming, when first Margaret and then the others caught the distant note of a fog horn. They were not utterly out of reach of land then.

Lawrence drew a long breath. "I shouldn't wonder," he said to Margaret, "if we were outside the bay, but we're headed back towards it. That's probably the horn on the end of Thunder Cape or on Pie Island."

"Or somewhere else up or down the shore," put in Ralph.

"I don't much care where we are if we only get to solid land," replied Margaret. "If this fog would lift for just a minute!"

It was less than a half hour later when Ralph remarked, hopefully, "It's getting thinner all right."

A breeze was breaking the long swells, and the mist was beginning to blow and shift. Off to the left, or so it seemed, the distant fog horn sounded faintly. The lighthouse on Thunder Cape, Ralph knew, ought to be on his right if he were running into the bay, but he could not guess whether the horn really was at Thunder Cape light or somewhere else. He would run towards it anyway, but would take care not to go near enough to be in danger of the rocks.

Ralph had just come to this decision, when a sudden and unexpected gust of wind struck the boat, swinging her to the right before he had time to grasp the wheel more firmly. The wind rent the fog and revealed to him something dim and shadowy.

"Land ahead," he shouted, but the words were scarcely out of his mouth, when the mist closed in again.

He held on his way, however, towards the land of which he had caught a glimpse, until there came to his ears a sound that made him turn the wheel suddenly. The wind was rising, the water roughening, and the sound he heard was of waves beating on rocks. As he swung the boat to the right, a momentary lifting of the fog again showed him the land, rising high and steep, a dangerous shore to run into suddenly.



The fog was so dense that Margaret could scarcely distinguish Ralph.

"It's land, anyway," he called to his companions. "We'll go as close as we dare, and run along it till we find a place to put in."

"And then we'll have breakfast," cried Jack.

The others laughed. A glimpse of land had put new courage into them. The rapid thinning of the fog was lifting a heavy weight from their spirits. Though the mist wavered and changed, it did not again entirely blot out the shore.

Ralph steered as close as he dared. The constantly increasing wind was striking full against the towering rock wall and shattering the breakers upon it. Running sidewise to the waves, the launch, as she skirted the land, rolled and pitched.

Then suddenly there was a bump, a jar, a scrape, Ralph cried out sharply, and Lawrence tried to reverse his engine. The engine stopped, a wave slapped up against the side of the boat, and there was another jar and scrape. They had run on sunken rocks.

With quick presence of mind, Ralph seized the oar, that was always carried in the launch, and labored to keep her from being washed on the rocks. Lawrence had difficulty in starting the motor, and, in spite of Ralph's frantic efforts with the oar, the wind carried the boat so far in that she was in imminent danger of being dashed against the rock wall. Just in the nick of time the engine began to chug again.

The crests of several waves had come over the side, and Margaret and Jack went to bailing, while Ralph continued to steer cautiously alongside the shore, and Lawrence watched the engine. Apparently it had been injured in some way, for it ran slowly and jerkily, threatening every minute to stop.

The shore was a most inhospitable one, abrupt rock walls, ribbed like rows of irregular pillars, but without beaches at the base or rifts or coves to afford a landing place. Thick woods covered the summit. As the explorers went on, they found themselves less exposed to the wind. To the right they could discern the dim line of what appeared to be much lower land.

The fog had thinned until it no longer made navigation difficult, and the sun was shining through, giving promise of a bright day. But these were unfamiliar waters, and Ralph kept a sharp lookout for rocks, reefs and shallows, while Lawrence watched the engine anxiously, fearing it might stop at any moment.

High land appeared ahead, the shores drew together, and presently the boat entered a passageway between sheer rock walls. When, beyond that narrow neck, the water spread out into a bay, like an inland lake, with heavily wooded shores, the sudden change was both a surprise and a relief. In that sheltered place there was scarcely a ripple, and only

a light haze softened the greens, reds, yellows and browns of the autumn woods.

Then, all of a sudden, Margaret and the two older boys realized how worn out and nearly starved they were. Though they had a little food left in their picnic basket, none of them, the night before, had felt like eating. That morning Jack had eaten a slice of bread and butter, but the others had been too anxious and too busy to think of breakfast. Now they agreed that the first thing to do was to make a landing, have something to eat and kindle a fire to take the chill of the fog out of their bodies.

II

THE TRAIL

RALPH ran the boat alongside a birch tree that had toppled into the water, Lawrence stopped the engine, and the four ate their scanty breakfast of half a loaf of bread, a little butter, a small piece of cheese and two doughnuts. Then they scrambled along the tree trunk to the shore, and unlimbered their stiff muscles gathering wood. The place was thickly wooded, chiefly with spruce and balsam fir, but the trees were so wet from the fog that good fuel was hard to find. Luckily there was a small, sharp hatchet in the boat, and by chopping up some dead branches to get at the dry, inner parts, and using quantities of bark from the old birch, the boys succeeded in kindling a fire. They selected a bare, rocky place, where the flames could not spread into the underbrush, fallen leaves or moss.

As they warmed and dried themselves, the explorers discussed their next move.

"The first thing to do," said Lawrence, "is to discover where we are and how to get back to Fort William."

"It seems to me," Margaret answered, "that get-

ting food and shelter is more important than finding out just where we are."

"The two things belong together," Lawrence explained. "If we can reach food and shelter, there will be some one to tell us where we are. The real question is which way shall we go to look for it."

"I don't see but one way we can go," retorted Ralph, "up this bay or lake or river mouth or whatever it is. We can't go out into the open lake again with the wind blowing and the boat limping the way she has been doing ever since we struck those rocks."

"Let's see if we can find out what's wrong with the old boat," and Lawrence started towards the shore.

He could discover nothing the matter with the engine, and there was still a little gasoline in the tank. "The propeller must be bent," he said, "but we can't tell till we get her out of the water."

"And there's no way of doing that here," Ralph replied. "We'll have to go on as long as the gasoline holds out, and then run her ashore."

"If we can start her at all. I wonder if we're on the mainland or an island."

A little exploration convinced the boys that they were on a small and uninhabited island. After drenching the fire until not a spark was left, the four scrambled into the launch again. Lawrence had trouble starting the engine, but they finally got

under way, slowly and haltingly. Though their eyes searched every foot of shore and forest that came in sight, not a dock or a house or the slightest indication that any one had ever been there before them could they find.

As they approached what appeared to be the head of the bay, the water, which had been clear near the mouth, became thick, so that Ralph could not tell whether it was deep or shallow. Under his seat, Jack had found a trolling line, and had dropped the spoon hook over the stern. As they were going through the thick water, he felt a sudden jerk that almost pulled the line out of his hand. Larry went to his aid, and, after a struggle, they drew into the boat a fine pickerel of about four pounds.

"I'm almost hungry enough to eat that fellow raw," said Ralph, eyeing the prize. "Let's land and cook him."

As Ralph spoke, the motor stopped chugging. Lawrence tried to start it, but could not. Then he glanced at the indicator on the tank.

"The gasoline's all gone," he said. "We'll have to paddle ashore."

They were close to the shore, which still rose high and abrupt, but showed, in one place, a bit of stony beach at the base. There they succeeded in making a landing, drawing the bow of the boat up a little way and tying it securely to a misshapen spruce that grew in a cleft of the rock almost at the

water's edge. Their breakfast had been scarcely more than an aggravation to appetite and they were all eager to taste that fish.

Though the rock wall was steep, trees and bushes, juniper and trailing cedar had taken root in every shelf, crack and cranny where soil could lodge. While Ralph cleaned the fish, the others managed to collect dead wood and dry moss enough to make a cooking fire. They had no frying pan, but Lawrence placed some flat stones on either side of the fire, and, after it had burned down to coals, laid green alder shoots across. On this gridiron he broiled the fish, which Ralph had split in halves. When it was done, the castaways ate every scrap that was eatable, unsalted though it was.

"Well, Larry," said Ralph, after he had swallowed his last mouthful, "the boat's no use without gasoline, so the only thing to do is to climb this cliff and see what's on top. We'd better take the rugs, the hatchet and that fish line."

"And the bailing can," added Margaret, "we might need it to dip water with."

The climb was a hard one. Where the rock was not bare and vertical, it was slippery with moss and lichens and, on the shelves and in the crannies where trees and bushes grew, with fallen needles and leaf mould. Frequently the climbers had to catch hold of a branch or root to pull themselves up by or to keep them from slipping back.

When they reached the summit and turned to look out over the bay from which they had come, little cries of surprise and wonder escaped from their lips. Then they all stood silent.

It was Jack who broke the spell by asking anxiously, "Ralph, do you know where we are?"

"No, Jack," the older brother replied gravely, "I haven't the slightest idea."

Below him, the greens of balsam, spruce and cedar, the autumn reds and yellows and bare branches of deciduous trees, blended into masses of forest, cut here and there by gleaming strips of water. Nowhere could he discover a field or garden, a boat or wharf, a roof or chimney or whiff of curling smoke. Beyond that wilderness, stretched the lake, its blue melting into the white haze that veiled the meeting of sky and water.

Lawrence drew a long breath. "Where in the world are we?" he asked wonderingly. "From the position of the sun we must be looking west or northwest, and yet that is the open lake out there. Have we drifted clear across Superior in a night?"

"It can't be the big lake," Ralph replied. "If that is west, we're somewhere on Thunder Cape. That haze in the distance keeps us from seeing shore."

Lawrence shook his head. "There's nothing like that," he pointed to the woods and waters below him, "on the Thunder Bay side of the cape. It

isn't broken up into bays and islands that way. And we can't be on the lake side unless the sun is turned around. We are somewhere else."

"Well, we can't have gone clear across the lake, that's sure. Maybe we're in Black Bay or the Nipigon country. Anyway there's nothing in sight but woods and water. Let's see if we can get a look the other way."

The trees grew thick on the crest of the bluff. Instead of attempting to penetrate them, Ralph started along the edge, hoping to find an opening. In a few moments the others heard him calling to them. They found him examining a mark on the trunk of a spruce, an old, weathered scar, but clean cut and even, where the bark and a little of the wood had been sliced off.

"A blaze," exclaimed Lawrence, "cut with an ax."

"Yes, and there's another." Ralph pointed to a tree a few feet away. "We've struck a trail."

"Then let's follow it," cried Margaret. "It may take us to a house."

Ralph had gone on beyond the second blaze. "Here's another one," he called. "Come on. It's a trail all right."

The marks, which were not difficult to find, led away from the edge of the bluff through the woods, down a slope, then up a short, rather steep rise, and down a more gradual one. Still on the down

grade, the trail swung to the left a little, and Ralph saw ahead of him two high rocks towering above the trees. From one of these rocks, he might get a view of the surrounding country, he thought, as he hurried forward. Following a well defined path between the two, he looked for a place to scale one or the other. The rock on his right rose like a great monument, its sides running almost straight up, but the left hand one was more broken and irregular, and he easily climbed high enough to obtain a good view.

Evidently he was on the side of a high ridge. Below him the slope was thickly tree covered, and the forest, broken here and there by streaks and patches of water, stretched away into the distance. At the outer edge of the woodland he could see a narrow ribbon of water bounded by islands. Beyond the islands, the lake faded into sky. The country seemed as wild, as lacking in sign of human life, as strange and unrecognizable as that he had looked upon from the edge of the bluff. The boy's heart sank. Then he gave himself a little shake, squared his shoulders, and called to the others to join him.

They did not delay long to gaze at that unknown country. The only evidences of human handiwork they had discovered were the marks on the trees, and the castaways were determined to follow wherever those blazes might lead. From the high rocks

the trail was a well defined track, distinct enough to be followed readily even without the guidance of the blazes. Its clearness was its only good trait however, for it was decidedly rough to travel. It ran up and down ridges, over slippery rocks, and fallen trees, through spongy moss and sticky bogs, and always through the woods. Encouraged by the knowledge that other people had come and gone that way, the four went on as fast as they could. Somewhere ahead there must be men, houses.

Then the track ended abruptly at the water's edge. There was not even a dock. The castaways had reached another bay or lake. Margaret dropped down on the bank and turned her head away, the tears came to Jack's eyes, and Ralph and Larry stared at each other in dismay. A big, white gull, sailing by on his long wings, seemed to jeer at them with his harsh, mocking cry.

After a moment Ralph said emphatically, "There must be people living around here somewhere."

"They come here by boat then," Lawrence replied, "and that trail doesn't really lead anywhere, only up to those big rocks and on to the edge of the bluff."

"Just the same," Ralph clung stubbornly to the one thing he was sure of, "people have gone that way, and they must have come from somewhere. Let's go along the shore."

“ Which way? ”

“ I don't know. It looks a little as if some one might have been through here,” and Ralph pointed to the left.

“ I can't see any signs, but we may as well try it in that direction I suppose.”

III

THE LOG CABIN ON THE ISLAND

GOING along the shore was even harder work than following the trail. The forest grew to the water line, and in the soft, treacherous leaf mould and decayed wood, the tired travelers never knew how far their feet were going down. Fallen tree trunks, slippery with moss and lichens and often so rotten that they crumbled away when stepped on, had to be climbed over. Impenetrable clumps of small balsams must be skirted, and wide patches of ground hemlock and tangles of bushes pushed through. Hope of food and shelter had spurred the castaways down the trail, but that hope had almost vanished.

They were plodding doggedly on, wondering if they ought to have gone the other way, when they came upon a small, open space.

Lawrence uttered an exclamation and pointed to a stump. "Some one's been cutting trees here," he cried.

"Sure enough," Ralph answered excitedly. "Nothing but an ax ever did that, and there's another and another, and chips and a pile of branches."

"They weren't cut so very long ago either," Larry went on. "The stumps aren't weathered much. Some one must live near here."

"Maybe it was only a camper." The hope died out of Ralph's face. "He may have been gone for weeks."

"The only thing to do is to go on and find out."

Somewhat encouraged by the sight of the stumps, the four took up their weary march again. They had not gone far when Ralph, who remained in the lead, rounded a dense clump of balsam trees, and came suddenly upon a clearing, a real clearing, where, a little way back from the water, stood a small, board shack.

The lad's first feeling of joy ebbed when he noticed that the place appeared to be deserted. No smoke rose from the projecting stovepipe, and a boat, drawn well beyond the water line, was turned bottom up and covered with a piece of canvas weighted with stones. After a quick glance about the clearing, he crossed the open ground at a run, and hammered on the door of the shanty.

"Is any one at home?" he shouted.

As Ralph called, Lawrence, closely followed by Margaret and Jack, came around the thicket of balsams. There was no response to Ralph's knocks and shouts.

"No one here," he called back to the others.

Larry had noticed the covered rowboat. "I'm

afraid they're not coming back very soon," he said. "Can you get in?"

"There's no lock," and Ralph pushed the door open.

He looked into a small room with rough board walls. It was crowded with a bunk, a cooking stove, a table, two rustic chairs made of poles and canvas, cooking utensils, fishing tackle and various things, jumbled together without any attempt at order. The explorers did not hesitate to search for food, but not a scrap could they find. Evidently whoever had lived there had cleaned out his larder before he left. In a leanto shed were a number of broken boxes, a grindstone and a pair of oars.

"I suppose we can stay here all night if we have to," Margaret said, sinking wearily into a canvas chair, "but you boys will have to catch another fish."

At that moment, Jack, who had gone down to the water, raised a shout. "There's another house," he called.

Ralph almost tumbled out of the door. "Where?" he demanded.

"Over there." Jack pointed across the water to a shingled roof showing among the trees.

"Let's take this boat," and Ralph began pulling off the canvas cover.

The boat, a small, clumsily built, flat-bottomed one, the boys dragged and pushed down to the water, while Margaret went to the shed for the oars. A

short row brought the adventurers to a point, where the roof could be seen above the trees. They rounded the point, drew up at a dock, and followed a path to a well-built, log house.

Ralph rapped vigorously. He thought he heard some one moving within, and knocked again, but there was no response. Then he tried the door. It was locked, but something within the house fell with a clatter.

"There's some one in there," he said, "but he doesn't want to come to the door."

Several times he rapped and shouted.

"The windows all have board shutters on and the back door is locked," said Lawrence, returning from a tour around the house.

"There's some one in there just the same," Ralph insisted. "I heard him moving and then he dropped something."

Lawrence, who was standing a little back from the house, began to laugh. "There's the *person* you heard," he said, pointing to the roof. The head of a squirrel protruded from the chimney. The little animal sprang out and down to the roof, chattering vehemently. "You disturbed him," Larry went on, "and in scampering around he upset something. He probably has his winter supply of nuts and cones in there."

Apparently Lawrence was right, for there were no further sounds from the locked house.

"There's no way of getting in here unless we break in," said Ralph, "and there isn't much chance we'd find anything to eat if we did."

"Well," suggested Lawrence, "we've found two houses, and where there are two there are likely to be more. Let's go on. There may be someone left alive somewhere."

The house was on an island, so the castaways were obliged to take to the boat again. Traveling by water was easier than by land, and they went on down the bay or lake, past wooded shores and islands, looking eagerly for signs of habitation. A chimney above the tree tops caught Margaret's eye, and they made towards it. Turning into a narrow channel, they came suddenly in view of a small, but substantial looking log cabin.

They tied the boat at the little dock, and hurried up to the house. The unshuttered windows gave them hope, but there was no answer to their knocks. After they had rapped and shouted, Ralph tried the door. To his surprise it opened. He looked in, hesitated a moment, then entered, the others following.

The room in which they found themselves was plainly and roughly furnished, but neat and comfortable. A table with a blue cover stood before a large fireplace, there were several chairs, and a rug on the floor. Margaret made straight for an open door to the left of the fireplace.

A moment later she called joyfully, "I've found something to eat, boys."

In haste Ralph and Jack followed her into the kitchen.

"There's nearly half a sack of flour," she explained, "a lot of corn-meal, a piece of bacon and some sugar and salt. And here's a can part full of baking powder," she added.

"And a can of corn syrup," announced Ralph, who was rummaging a shelf. "We won't starve tonight at any rate."

"If you boys will make a fire in the stove, we'll have a meal right away."

"Suppose the people who live here come back in the middle of it."

"They won't," said Larry, who had just come into the kitchen, "I've been in the bedrooms. There are three cots and a bedstead, with bedding, but no clothes except an old hat. If any one were living here now he would have some clothes about."

"The front door was unlocked though."

"The lock is broken. I noticed that as we came in."

"We'll have some dinner anyway, even if they do come back," insisted Margaret.

"Goody, goody," cried Jack. Then he stopped suddenly. A doubtful look came over his face. "Won't it be stealing to take these things?" he asked. "They don't belong to us."

"No, Jacky, it won't be stealing under the circumstances," Ralph replied gravely. "We're stranded you see and likely to starve. Whoever left that food here wouldn't be so hard hearted as to refuse us something to eat if we could ask him. We wouldn't use the things if we could help it, and when we get away from here we'll find out who owns the place, and we'll pay him for every bite we've eaten."

"For that matter," added Margaret, "we have some money with us, and we can leave enough to pay for what we use, with a note telling why we took it."

In a shed behind the house, the boys found a pile of wood, and they soon had good fires going in the stove and fireplace. A rowboat put up in the shed for winter convinced them that the owners of the house would not be back very soon.

"Can't we have pancakes, Meg, to go with that bacon?" Ralph asked.

"I don't believe they'd be very good made with water and no eggs," she replied doubtfully, "but we might have hoe cake or corn-meal mush."

"Which can you make the quickest?" Lawrence demanded.

"Mush, I think. The cakes would have to bake."

"Then I'm for mush."

Bacon and mush with corn syrup might have

seemed a meager meal at home, but the four were too thankful for any kind of food to complain. Darkness had come before their dinner was over, and they finished eating by candlelight. There was a lamp in the living room, but the kerosene can was empty. However, Ralph had found a box of candles in the kitchen.

"It's too late to go any farther to-night," he said, as he pushed back his chair. "We'll have to camp right here. We're all dead tired. Jack is half asleep already."

One bedroom held a bedstead and cot and the other two spring cots, all with plenty of good, clean bedding. The worn out wanderers did not hesitate to use them.

There was a bolt on the front door, and, as Ralph fastened it, he said with a grin, "Now if the owner comes home in the night, he'll have to knock."

"I'm not sure he would waken me if he battered the door in," responded Larry with a yawn.

IV

THE DESERTED FISHING CAMP

ALL four slept late the next morning. By the time they had put everything in the cabin in as good order as they had found it, and were ready to start out again, it was nearly ten o'clock.

"We can go in the boat," said Lawrence. "If we don't find any one living near here, we can come back for another meal."

He had rowed but a short distance along the narrow waterway lying between the island where the cabin stood and a thickly wooded shore to the right, when docks running out from that shore, and, a moment later, sheds or boat-houses, came into view. As the explorers passed the end of the little island, they saw, to their left, across a short stretch of water, more docks and several buildings.

"We're coming to a town," exclaimed Jack.

"I'm afraid it's a deserted one," his brother replied. "No one is in sight. That must be a fishing camp." He pointed to the docks and sheds at the right. "See the reels. There ought to be some one there."

The large reels, that stood in a row near the

water, were empty of nets, however. From the stovepipe chimneys of the two log houses beyond the sheds, no smoke issued. After glancing into a boat-house that contained a gasoline launch, and hastily examining a shed piled with barrels, boxes and various odds and ends, the older boys went up to the houses. Their knocks brought no reply.

"The fishermen can't have gone for good," Ralph said. "Their launch isn't put up for winter and their rowboats aren't out of the water. Let's go over to that other place. I wonder if that's a fishing camp, too."

The "other place" proved to be a good sized island with a number of buildings. On one that stood close to the water was a sign reading "Smith Harbor, Michigan."

"Michigan!" Ralph cried in amazement. "We *have* gone clear across the Lake — but we *couldn't* in one night! It's impossible."

"I feel as if I were going crazy," said Lawrence. "If that sign said Minnesota it would be bad enough. I don't believe we could even go that far in a night. But Michigan! That's a joke of some kind."

"It's a mighty poor one then," grunted Ralph, "but it's either a joke or a mistake, or we're all crazy or dreaming. We can't be in Michigan, that's sure."

The explorers followed a path around the island, knocking at every door, but the buildings were all

locked and silent. There were no reels, and the place did not look like a market fisherman's camp.

"It's a little summer resort," said Ralph.

"Yes, that accounts for it's being deserted and yet so well kept up. The Superior summer resort season was over several weeks ago. If this is a summer resort, there must be a railroad not far away, or else steamers come in here."

"The fishing station seems to prove that," Ralph agreed. "Let's go on. Perhaps we'll come to something that will show us where we are."

Beyond the fishing camp the shore rose high. Great, gray rocks were streaked orange, brown and gray-green with lichens and metallic stains. Near the end of this point the castaways climbed a long flight of steps that led to another locked and deserted cabin.

From this high ground they could see that the waterway they had been following was part of a bay, evidently lying parallel to the one they had first entered. To their left, beyond and above wooded islands and shores, towered the ridge they had crossed the day before. Apparently the ridge formed a long, high finger of land projecting much farther into the lake than the point on which they stood.

Rough water ahead prevented rowing farther in that direction. So the explorers turned back to take another look at the fishing camp. This time they

did not content themselves with rapping. The back door of the larger house was fastened with a padlock, but the staple was loose. After a moment's hesitation, Ralph pulled it out.

"I don't like to break in," he said, "but we won't do any harm."

In the kitchen and in an adjoining store-room, the four met with a surprise. Shelves and floor were piled with sacks, boxes, cases, cans, of food supplies, enough to keep a family for months.

"Those people must be coming back," said Meg emphatically, "or they never would have left all these things here."

"They may be returning to-night for all we know," Lawrence answered. "The fishing season isn't over by any means. It lasts as long as there is plenty of open water."

"The boats that collect the fish keep running as long as the fishing is good don't they?" asked Ralph. "This must be one of the collecting points."

"It looks like it. I don't believe the fishermen can have gone far away, and, as Meg says, they must be coming back. The sight of all this food makes me hungry. Isn't it time for lunch?"

"After time," replied Margaret, "but I think we had better go back to that other house. We broke in here and I don't feel comfortable staying. I'm going to borrow a can of milk though, so I can make

pancakes. I'll leave the money to pay for it right here on the shelf in front of the cans."

Ralph put the staple back in the door, and led the way down to the boat. The morning had been bright, but the sky was clouding over now, and the wind was raw and chilly. Before the four had finished their meal of pancakes and corn syrup, rain was coming down hard and steadily.

"I guess we'll have to stay here for the rest of the day," said Ralph. "We have shelter and warmth and a little something to eat anyway."

"I've been thinking," remarked Lawrence, "that unless the fishermen have gone for good, and it certainly doesn't look as if they had, there may be a steamboat or a tug coming in here any time. We must keep our ears open for a boat whistle. We're near enough to hear it and to get to the dock in five minutes if we don't waste any time."

"Yes," Ralph agreed, "we want to be ready to jump and run for the rowboat at a moment's notice."

"Do you suppose any one will come to look for us?" asked Jack.

"It's hard to tell, Jacky," his brother replied thoughtfully. "Of course we'll be missed sooner or later, but I'm afraid no one will have any idea what became of us or where to look."

The four young people were very much alone in the world. The three Elliots, born and bred in the city, had, before that summer, known little of any-

thing but town life. They were orphans, for their mother had died when Jack was a baby, and their father had been killed in an accident about two years before the opening of this story, when Margaret and Ralph, who were twins, were a little over fourteen.

One night, the spring before this story begins, Margaret was awakened by the light of flames and the smell of smoke, to find that the business block next door to their little house was on fire. To save the house was impossible. It was burned to the ground with all of their furniture and most of their personal belongings. In an attempt to rescue his pet dog, Jack had been overcome and almost smothered by the smoke. He had always been delicate, and the doctors at the hospital, where the boy was carried unconscious, discovered that his lungs were weak, and advised that he be taken into the country for the summer at least.

When Ralph was twelve, he had spent a month with his uncle on Thunder Bay, Lake Superior. He had delightful memories of the place, and, as soon as Jack was able to be up, the older brother proposed that they go to Thunder Bay. For a week they stayed at a boarding house in Fort William, where they made the acquaintance of Lawrence Kingsley, a Canadian boy about a year older than Ralph. The Elliots found the boarding house expensive and not a very good place for Jack, so they

rented a small cottage out from the town on the lake shore. Margaret was a good housekeeper, and the three lived there very happily, Jack improving steadily in health and strength.

Ralph and Lawrence had struck up a warm friendship, and the Canadian boy was with the Elliots much of the time. He, too, was an orphan, but, as Ralph discovered by accident, for Lawrence did not talk about his money, a wealthy one. His guardian was a busy man, absorbed in many interests, and though he looked after the boy's property faithfully, he had little time or inclination to pay much attention to the lad himself. In June the guardian had gone to Europe on a business trip that would keep him six months or more, and Lawrence, after his school in eastern Canada was over, had come to Lake Superior for his vacation.

In the boat house that went with the Elliots' cottage, Larry kept his little launch, and the four spent much of their time on the water. Margaret and Ralph had intended to return to the United States in September, but the autumn weather was so fine and Jack was gaining so rapidly that they stayed on and on, planning to make up later the time lost at school. Lawrence's school opened the first of October, but he also decided to take a longer holiday, and Ralph persuaded him to spend a week or two at the cottage before they were obliged to part.

As Lawrence had left the boarding house, he

would not be missed there. The Elliots had no near neighbors, and their rent had been paid to the middle of October. Several days might pass before their disappearance would be noticed, and then, unless some one had seen them starting out the day of the fog, no one would be able to even guess what had become of them.

All that afternoon and night and most of the next day rain fell so steadily that to have left the comfortable shelter of the cabin would have been folly. Once, when the storm ceased for a short time, the older boys went out in the rowboat and succeeded in catching three small fish, a welcome addition to their food supply. They listened constantly for the whistle of a steamboat, but the beating of the rain, the dashing of waves on the rocks beyond the fishing camp, the rustling and rattling of the wind in the trees and the whining cries of the gulls were the only sounds that broke the stillness of the deserted harbor.

After rain had been falling almost constantly for more than twenty-four hours, the clouds broke and the sky began to clear. Ralph and Larry rowed over to the fishing station, in the hope that the fishermen might have returned. Finding the camp still deserted, they followed a trail that led from behind the houses up a little rise, through the dripping woods and out on the other side of the point. This was a very different sort of place from the harbor

where they had been staying. The shore, instead of being wooded to the edge, was composed of great masses of rock, stretching to the end of the point in one direction and as far as the boys could see in the other, and broken and riven and eaten out into all manner of queer shapes. Islands, bare or tree covered, a half mile or more off shore, afforded only slight protection from the winds of the open lake.

"It doesn't seem encouraging in this direction," said Lawrence, "but we must have a look at the rest of our bay to-morrow. I can't help feeling that there may be an occupied house somewhere."

The search next day was unsuccessful. The explorers found several more houses, but all were locked and deserted. Clear to the head of the long harbor, four or five miles from the fishing camp, the boys rowed, and saw not a living thing, except a few hares, squirrels and birds. By going so far from the docks, the castaways ran the risk of missing a boat, but they were restless and felt they ought to be making some effort to get away. So they took the chance.

"We can't stay forever waiting for a steamboat or for those fishermen to come back," said Ralph, as they were returning to the cabin that had sheltered them for three nights. "We've got to get out of here."

"What I want to do," Larry replied, "is to go up to the top of those hills, not where we were be-

fore, but up there beyond the head of the bay, to the highest spot we can find. Then perhaps we can get some idea of where we are."

"At least," added Ralph, "we may be able to get sight of a town or docks or a fishing camp. It seems likely that there may be other fishing stations not far away."

"If we do that," suggested Margaret, "we must take provisions enough so we won't have to come back again if we see any place to go. If you boys will get some beans and a little piece of pork from the fishermen's house, I'll bake them. I saw a tin can of hard yeast cakes there, too. Bring me two of those and I'll set bread. To-morrow is Sunday. We can rest up and get ready, and start out early Monday morning."

"That's a good idea," Ralph agreed. "We'll take enough food to last us a couple of days, if necessary. With plenty to eat, the rugs and the hatchet, we can camp anywhere."

V

UP TO THE RIDGE TOP

A LIGHT fog, with the sun shining through, gave promise Monday of a good day. Lawrence had found paper and ink in the house and had written three notes, explaining how the castaways had been forced to take possession of shelter, food and boat. Margaret had proposed that they leave money to pay for the supplies used, but he had objected. They might need the little money they had with them, he said, before they reached civilization. He had given his address, however, and had promised to pay for everything taken and for any damage done.

Because of the labor and difficulty of walking along the shore, they had decided to go by water, pausing at the shack to leave Larry's note explaining that they would put the boat in a safe place near the head of the harbor.

Taking turns at the oars, Ralph and Lawrence rowed almost to the end of the bay. They landed at a convenient spot, dragged the boat well above water line, and turned it over, the oars under it, in the shelter of a clump of evergreens. To mark

the place they made a cairn, a pile of stones, plainly visible from the water. The provisions had been packed in the bailing can and some tin boxes, and, with the steamer rugs, made into packs, which Larry and Ralph fastened to their shoulders with strips of old canvas. They had agreed that it would be best to blaze a tree here and there, so if they were obliged to turn back, they could find their way.

The first time Ralph lifted the hatchet to make a cut, Larry stopped him. "Hold on," he said. "You're not doing that right."

"Why not? It's just about the same height from the ground as those we followed."

"The height's all right, but if you cut your blazes on this side, how do you expect to see them when you're coming back? You don't want to walk around every tree to look for a mark on it."

Ralph looked chagrined. "I'm an idiot," he said. "Of course you've got to make your cut on the side you'll see coming back. I'm a green woodsman for sure."

"You don't need to slice deep enough to wound the tree either," Lawrence added.

"A little wound in a healthy tree can't do much harm."

"Not if it's let alone, but the bark is the armor of the tree. Where it's cut off, insects have a chance to get in and lay eggs, and kill that tree and maybe the others around it. I know a forestry expert who

says you ought to be almost as careful how you treat a tree as how you treat a man."

At first the explorers had to push through dense woods. If they had been obliged to go far over level country, they might easily have lost their sense of direction, but fortunately the ground soon began to rise, and the slope helped them to keep headed the right way.

As they went on, the rise became more rapid, the trees and bushes less dense, and the ground rockier. Sometimes there were stretches of open hillside, bare except for mosses, clumps of dainty ferns a few inches high that seemed to grow right out of the rock, and low-growing plants in thin patches of soil. Some of the plants bore bright red berries that Larry said were bearberries and not good to eat. Others he recognized as blueberry plants, but it was too late for the fruit, and scarcely a dried up berry remained.

After the four had climbed for some time, they found themselves on the summit of a ridge that fell away sharply on the other side. Beyond a ravine, another hill rose much higher.

"We haven't more than got started yet," said Ralph, "and it's after noon. We'd better have our lunch here before we go on."

The boys unfastened their packs and spread out the rugs. A red squirrel in a jack pine near by startled them with a sudden outburst of angry chat-

ter. For a moment they thought it was their presence he objected to, till Margaret caught sight of a little chipmunk whisking away from under the tree, with a cone, almost as big as he was, in his mouth. The squirrel had cut off the cone and let it drop, and the saucy chipmunk had stolen it. He had slipped into a hole in the rocks before the irate squirrel reached the ground.

The travelers did not waste time making a fire, but ate their pork and beans cold. In spite of the lack of butter for their bread, lunch tasted decidedly good, and they were so comfortable there in the sun that they allowed themselves a half hour's rest. They could see out across woods and waters to the east, but failed, as before, to find any sign of men or dwellings.

After their rest, as they were scrambling down the other side of the ridge, Ralph's pack caught on a branch and jerked him backwards so sharply that his feet slipped from under him. The strain was too much for the worn canvas strap. It broke, and boy and pack went sliding and rolling down the steep slope until they crashed into a scraggly spruce. Except for a few bruises, Ralph was unhurt, but Larry had to help him readjust his pack and tie the broken strap.

A small stream ran through the ravine. After pausing for a drink of the brownish, but clear and tasteless water, the explorers started up stream,

looking for a convenient place to cross. A short walk brought them to a bog or muskeg, as Larry called it. Some queer looking plants at the edge of the bog caught Margaret's eye.

"Look here, boys," she cried, "what a strange plant!"

"That's a pitcher plant," Lawrence replied. "See those queer, closed leaves that hold water."

"I thought those were flowers," said Jack. "Is that the way they drink?"

"It's the way they eat. Bugs and flies, attracted by a sort of sweet nectar, try to go into the pitchers. They go in all right, but the little hairs you see there pointing downward prevent them from getting out again. They fall into the water, and the plant actually absorbs them, digests them or something like that."

"What a horrid plant," said Meg. "It's a regular cannibal." But she picked one of the queer leaves, its green streaked with gay coloring, emptied the water from it and stuck it in her belt.

The muskeg was covered with low-growing plants and shrubs and soft, spongy, treacherous moss, concealing the mud and water underneath. Not caring to attempt to cross it, the four retraced their steps to firmer ground, took off their shoes and stockings and waded the stream. They found it rather cold, but not deep.

Then they began to go up again, first a gradual

slope among thick trees, and then a steeper and steeper rise, with frequent open spaces. They were climbing the ridge in earnest now. The clumsy, ill-adjusted packs grew heavy, as the bearers toiled up the rocky slopes. At last there remained but one steep wall of rock between them and the summit.

Ralph scrambled up and reached over to help Meg and Jack, while Lawrence boosted from below, and then climbed up in turn. Miles of thickly wooded country lay below them, with the open lake blue beyond. Far across the water was a faint line of smoke from an invisible steamer.

"It isn't very clear in the distance in spite of the bright sun," said Lawrence, as his eyes sought for a shore line. "There may be, there must be, land off there somewhere."

"Unless we are really on the Michigan Peninsula," Ralph answered.

"That's nonsense, a sheer impossibility. I don't see anything that looks like civilization, do you?"

"Not a sign."

The view to east and south was no more satisfactory. There was no indication of even a fishing camp.

"We're not on the highest ground yet," said Ralph. "Let's go along here on the top."

The ridge was roughly flat topped, with scanty growth of moss, lichens, juniper, bearberries and other small plants that flourish with scarcely enough

soil to anchor them. There were also stunted and twisted jack pines, balsams and spruces, as well as bare-branched small trees and bushes. In spite of rough and broken rocks, going along the summit was not as hard work as climbing steep slopes or penetrating thick forest.

On either side nothing was to be seen but woods and water. Led on by the hope of reaching a spot where they could get a better survey ahead, only to be disappointed again and again as higher ground, trees or heaped up rocks blocked the view, the four trudged and scrambled on for two miles or more. They were all used to walking, but, in spite of the bracing effect of the crisp, October air, little Jack was tiring out, and Margaret was almost as weary.

"I don't see any use going farther," she said, sinking down on a rock.

"It's no use going back either," Ralph replied.

"We couldn't reach the boat before dark, even if Jack could stand the trip back," Larry added. "We must camp somewhere."

"There is no water around here. We'll have to go ahead until we find some or go back to that ravine. Brace up, Meg, you and Jack can stand it a little farther. Maybe we'll come to a stream."

For what seemed like hours to Margaret and Jack, they went wearily forward. It would be a long tramp to the brook in the ravine, and they were reluctant to turn back. At last, Ralph, who had

climbed a rock a little in advance and to the right of the others, gave a shout.

"There's a lake down there," he cried, "a fine place to camp."

Margaret and Lawrence hastened to join him. Far below them, they saw an inland lake of irregular shape, with thickly wooded shores and little islands. Meg gave a sigh of discouragement.

"That must be at least a mile away," she said. "I suppose I can make it, but Jack simply can't unless we carry him. You know his pluck is bigger than his strength, and he'll go till he drops, but he's just ready to drop now."

"That's so," replied Ralph. "He is pretty well done up, but we ought to get to that lake. I don't believe it's more than half a mile."

"Why not bring the lake here?" suggested Larry. "Margaret and Jack can stay here, while you and I go down there and bring back some water. The bailing can holds at least two quarts, enough for to-night anyway."

"I don't know," said Margaret hesitatingly, "as I like the idea of your leaving Jack and me here alone."

"Nonsense! There's not a thing to hurt you. We haven't seen any wild animals worse than hares, and you're not afraid of them, are you?"

Meg flushed. "Of course not," she said. "Go along. It seems the only thing to do."

"We'll cut some branches and make a place for Jack to rest first. We have time enough before sunset."

The older boys took off their packs, and, with hatchet and pocket knives, cut enough balsam branches and trailing cedar to make a rough bed under a twisted, old, gray pine tree. Rolled in a rug, Jack was glad to lie down.

"We'll have to take the hatchet and mark some trees, so we can find our way back quickly," said Lawrence. "The woods look thick around the lake. We won't be gone long Meg."

Rapidly the two lads scrambled down the steep slope until they came to almost level ground. There they might easily have lost their way in the woods, but cutting blazes helped them to keep the general direction and they reached the lake without much difficulty. The sun had set when they came out on a low shore, fringed with bushes and aspens. Near a marshy place, where there was evidently an inlet or outlet, they could see, rising from the water, a conical heap of sticks, branches and mud.

"A beaver house," exclaimed Larry.

"There's one of the inhabitants," replied Ralph, pointing to something swimming towards the shore.

Slipping behind a clump of willows, they watched the swimmer approach. He evidently knew where he wanted to go, for he came on steadily and without hesitation. Reaching shallow water, he wad-

dled to land, a chunky, humpbacked beast, with short legs and broad, flat, scaly looking tail. He paused, looked about him a moment, then moved on slowly and awkwardly, and stopped near a small aspen only a few feet from the boys. For several seconds he gazed up at the top. Then he went close to the tree, grasped the trunk with his strong, long-clawed, fore paws, spread his hind legs, sat back on his tail, and took a deliberate bite of the bark. Apparently he had not noticed the intruders, who stood motionless and watched the queer animal, as he gnawed away at the tree with his strong, chisel-like teeth. Sometimes he pulled out a bit by leaning backward, sometimes he split off a piece by tilting his head, forcing his lower, front teeth behind the chip and using his jaws as a lever. The boys marveled at the strength of the beast's jaw muscles.

He had not been working long, when two others appeared, swimming about in the lake for a few moments, then coming ashore and setting to work. Just beyond where the first beaver was working was a newly felled tree five or six inches in diameter. One of the animals gnawed off a branch, tugged it to the water and swam off with it. He swam with his hind legs and webbed, hind feet, his tail acting as a rudder, and the branch held in his teeth, the end over his shoulder. The third beaver at once took his place and began to gnaw off a second branch.

Unwilling to go away until the first beaver had

felled his tree, the lads lingered, watching the workers. The little tree cutter did most of his work from one side. When the tree was almost ready to fall, he paused, looked up at the top, thudded the ground vigorously with his tail, hurriedly pulled out one more chip, and ran away just before the tree swayed and fell, its crown splashing into the lake. The beast working near by fled at the warning.

The boys took advantage of the disturbance to make off, without frightening the workers. Glancing back later, they saw that both animals had returned to their tasks, the one that had felled the tree being engaged in cutting off a section of the trunk.

"That's the first time I ever had a chance to watch beavers work," said Lawrence. "If the wind hadn't been just right they would have scented us. They are timid beasts I've heard, and usually work at night. They must be enlarging their house for winter or building a dam."

"Did you notice," queried Ralph, "that each one seemed to know just what he was supposed to do, and went right at it, and they never interfered with one another for a second. I tried to make out which one was bossing, but I couldn't."

"You know now what it means to 'work like a beaver,' " Larry replied. "They didn't seem to hurry any, but they kept right at it."

Wishing to get a better view of the lake, the lads

went on along the shore. Presently, however, they decided that they must not go farther if they were to get back to the ridge top before dark. At the spot where they paused, the lake water was clear and tasteless, and they each took a good drink. As Lawrence stooped to fill the can, Ralph noticed, a little way up the shore, in the dusk of the woods, something that excited his curiosity.

"That's a queer place for a rock," he said.

Scarcely thinking what he was doing, he picked up, from the water's edge, a stone, and threw it at the object, a large, dark colored rock almost hidden among the bushes and trees. Boy like, he threw with all his strength.

His stone struck, and then a queer thing happened. There came a great bellow. The rock that was not a rock moved suddenly. There was a crashing among the bushes. A big, ugly head with tremendous horns came into view.

"A moose!" cried Larry. "Up a tree, quick."

Before the words were out of Larry's mouth, Ralph had jumped for a twisted, old birch tree, and was climbing for all he was worth. He had a fleeting glimpse of his companion making his way up a cedar.

VI

TREED BY A MOOSE

THE moose came on, crashing through the trees and underbrush. Ralph had scarcely begun to climb when the beast was under the birch, tossing his antlers, tearing at the ground with his hoofs, and bellowing furiously. The boy's stone could not have hurt him much, through his thick hide, but it must have offended his dignity. Ordinarily a moose is a harmless animal enough, but once his temper is aroused, he is formidable indeed, and that was the season when he was in his least amiable frame of mind.

He was surely angry. He reared his big body, it looked enormous to Ralph, and reached for the boy with his great, spiked antlers. Only an intervening branch saved the lad from the sharp prongs. In trembling haste he scrambled up as high as he could. Having failed to get at Ralph with his horns, the animal began striking into the tree, trunk and branches, with his fore hoofs, and bumping up against it with his great bulk, as if he were trying to knock it down. He shook it so, Ralph had all he could do to hold on. He had the hatchet in one

hand, and could grasp the tree with his legs and the other hand only. Once he almost lost his grip, and the narrow escape brought his heart into his mouth, for if he had fallen he would have gone down right on top of the furious beast.

Unable to jar the boy out of the tree, the moose stamped around under it, sending the rotten wood, leaves and earth flying in showers with his sharp-edged hoofs, and bellowing and roaring with the full force of his voice and lungs.

When he had exhausted his first rage, he quieted down a little. Then a rustling in the big cedar, where Lawrence was, attracted his attention.

"Look out," Ralph called. "He's coming for you. Hold on or he'll jar you out."

Before Ralph had finished his warning, the beast had charged Larry's tree, but Larry held fast. Ralph could just see the top of his friend's head and part of one arm between the branches.

The moose favored Lawrence with his attentions for a while, then he went back to Ralph. He had stopped bellowing, and only snorted now and then. Evidently he was not as angry as he had been. He did not charge the birch that time, but just rubbed up against it hard, then drew off a little and shook his antlers at it. He showed no intention of going away, however, but kept close to the trees where the boys had taken refuge.

It was the first time Ralph had ever seen a moose,

but he had plenty of chance to study the animal. He was an ugly looking beast, with his great, homely head with its long, hooked muzzle, little eyes, and big, coarse ears, his short, thick neck with a ragged-haired fold of skin hanging down from it, his big shoulders and chest, his sloping back and comparatively small, lean hindquarters which seemed out of all proportion to the rest of him. His antlers were wonderful though, great, spreading horns, shaped like deeply cut leaves, with thirty or forty sharp prongs. The boy thought they must be five feet or more across at the widest part. He realized with a shiver that it would not take those prongs many minutes to tear him to bits if they ever reached him.

After the moose had quieted down, he decided to feed a little. His fore legs were so long and his neck so short, that he did not look as if he could reach down to graze from the ground. At any rate he did not attempt to. He selected a slender, young birch, put his big chest against it, and pushed. The birch bent of course. He held it in position with his chest, and straddled it. Keeping it down with his body and legs, he moved along, stretching out his neck, until he could reach the tender, growing parts with his curved, overhanging, upper lip. He seemed to like this food, and browsed quietly enough, though the slightest rustle in the trees made him pause and shake his antlers and snort a little.

After what seemed like several hours, but was probably not more than one, he apparently made up his mind that his prisoners were not worth bothering about any longer. Perhaps it was because they had kept still for so long. Going quietly this time, he started off through the woods. The boys waited until they could no longer hear the clicking of his cleft hoofs as the loose, spreading tips came together after every step. Then Ralph began to climb down from his tree.

He was stiff and cramped from holding on so long in an uncomfortable position, and, just as he was within a few feet of the ground, he slipped, lost hold and went down crash into a small balsam. Then he heard a bellow, and the bushes began to crackle. The moose was evidently not so far away as the lad had thought.

"He's coming back," called Larry, and Ralph untangled himself in a hurry from the balsam, and jumped for his birch again.

He had not reached his old place of safety when the moose burst out of the thicket close to Larry's cedar, and stood there stamping and tossing his antlers. Finding everything quiet, he soon grew calmer, and went to stripping the tender bark and twigs from a young aspen.

Time dragged on. The moose moved about through the woods, fed a little, went down to the shore to drink, but never went far away. Whether

he was really staying there to watch them, or whether this was merely a favorite stamping ground, the lads could not tell. The least move they made, when he was within hearing, attracted his attention, and he never wandered so far away but that they could hear his hoofs clicking. Now and then he snorted a little just to remind them of his presence. Since the sun had gone down, the air had been growing cold. The boys had left their coats on the ridge, and even their heavy flannel shirts did not keep out the chill. They ached all over from their uncomfortable positions, their legs and arms cramped and grew numb, and they could not move enough to relieve them.

It was directly due to this cramping that Ralph had an accident that made matters worse than they were before. The moose had returned from one of his little journeys, and was standing right under the birch. Ralph had been keeping perfectly still for some time for fear of arousing the beast, but grew so cramped and achy that he felt he must change his position. He moved just a little and attempted to shift the hatchet from his left hand to his right. The movement attracted the attention of the moose, and he bumped up against the tree, just as the lad was making the change. Jarred violently, Ralph had to seize a branch. The hatchet slipped from his grasp and went crashing down right on the moose. The boy did not know whether it was the

edge, the flat or the back that hit the animal, or what part of his body it struck, but the moose gave a tremendous bellow, the long hairs on his neck standing up with rage, reared up and came crashing right into the tree.

Ralph held on for all he was worth, while the furious beast stamped about, tearing up the ground, snorting, bellowing, striking with his fore hoofs, and driving his antlers into the tree, until his prisoner wondered that he did not break them clean off. He was in a fine fury, and his roars fairly deafened the boy. Ralph had never been so frightened in his life. He thought the moose was going to tear down the birch. Luckily it was a big, strong tree. Nevertheless the animal shook it and mauled it so that Ralph was in mortal fear of falling. He was stiff and numb, not only with cramping, but with fear as well, and it was a wonder he did not lose his hold. It would have been all up with him if he had. When the moose finally began to calm down, the lad found himself shaking and his teeth chattering as much with fright as with cold.

Dusk had changed into darkness, and still their jailer showed no sign of deserting the two boys. They did not attempt much communication, for every sound tended to excite the moose and throw him into a rage. Moreover they were too miserable to talk.

It was not only Ralph's body, but his mind that

suffered. He kept thinking of Meg and Jack on the ridge, and how frightened they must be at his failure to return. If there was one moose in the woods, there were probably others. What was to prevent a moose or some other wild animal from attacking them up there, and they had nothing to defend themselves with, not even the hatchet. His fears were not lessened any by a sound that came to him occasionally through the darkness, a far off, rather dog-like howling. "Wolves," he thought, "unless there is a hunter with dogs somewhere around here," and that he could not believe. His only comfort was that the sound seemed to come from beyond the lake, the opposite direction from the ridge.

He realized how foolish he and Larry had been to both of them come down to the lake. One or the other should have stayed with Margaret and Jack.

Time went on, and still the moose did not leave. For a while he was very quiet, then Ralph heard him stirring about. Looking between the branches, he could distinguish the huge form moving down to the water. The moose went in a little way, lowered his head to drink, then raised it, tossed his antlers for a moment, and sent a great bellow sounding out across the lake. In a moment there came a distant answer. Whether it was the voice of another moose or merely an echo, Ralph could not tell, but it seemed to ex-

cite the beast. With a great splashing he dashed forward into the water till it was up to his shoulders, then settled down to swim. He swam powerfully, leaving a wide wake.

There was no moon, but the night was unusually light, for a reason the boys were to discover later. So Ralph could see distinctly the animal's antlers black against the water. The moose made for a little island, but, instead of landing, he rounded the end and disappeared. The lad waited for perhaps five minutes, straining his eyes, but saw no more of the black antlers.

Then he called softly to Lawrence, "Larry, he's gone."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, he swam across and around the end of a little island out there. We'd better get out of this as fast as we can."

They scrambled stiffly and awkwardly down.

"Now," said Ralph, "we've got to find our way back to the ridge, but how we're going to do it in this darkness I don't know. I haven't even a match."

"I've something better than matches," Larry replied. Suddenly, from where his voice came from, there was a gleam of light.

"A flashlight," Ralph exclaimed.

"A little bit of one, but it's better than nothing.

When I took off my coat, it fell out, so I put it in my shirt pocket, and here it is."

"Let me have it a minute and I'll see if I can find the hatchet. We can't afford to lose that."

Ralph found the hatchet, its handle broken, under the birch. Then, fearing to see the moose returning, he glanced across the lake.

"Larry," he cried, "look there, at the sky."

The whole northern sky was streaked with waves and columns of light. Wavering and changing every moment, the *aurora borealis* flooded the sky from the zenith as far down as the boys could see. They had watched the northern lights a number of times in the last two months, but never had they seen them like that, so bright and full of color. The vibrating, changing waves and bands were flushed with yellow and pink and orange and green. The lads had no time to delay, but, as they went along the lake shore, their eyes turned again and again towards the beautiful dancing lights.

In spite of their haste, the boys did not forget to fill the can which Lawrence had clung to during the whole of the siege. As they drew near the beaver house, they caught a glimpse of the little woodcutters scurrying to the water.

The electric torch was only about six inches long, and gave a very small light. Fortunately it had a fresh battery, and, by turning it on one tree after

another, the fugitives managed to find their blazes. The lads were stiff and lame all over. As the light was of almost no use to illuminate their path, they were continually stumbling and missing their steps. They went as fast as they could though, for they dreaded every moment to hear the moose on their track. Several times they heard his bellow in the distance, across the lake probably, and the sound made them quicken their pace. But the going was slow at best. They made their way through the woods across the more level ground, and felt encouraged when they found themselves ascending the slope. As they came out of the thick growth, Ralph pointed to the ridge top.

"Look there," he said. "They've done that to guide us." On the summit of the ridge a fire blazed. "I'm mighty glad to know they're all right," and his voice shook.

The boys had limbered up considerably as they made their way through the woods, but, nevertheless, it was not easy work climbing the steep slope in the dark. They slipped and slid and bruised themselves before they succeeded in getting up.

As they gained the top, they shouted to let the others know they were coming, and felt relieved when Jack answered. In a few moments they had reached the fire, and Meg had her arms around Ralph's neck and was crying.

"That's just like a girl," her brother said. "She

braces up and is as plucky as can be till a thing is all over, and then she breaks down and cries." He neglected to mention the choky feeling in his own throat.

After Margaret had had her cry out, the boys told her what had kept them.

"A moose?" she exclaimed. "Then that was what I heard."

"What do you mean?" said Ralph, alarmed. "Was there one around here?"

"Oh no, but I heard something roaring down by the lake. After you left, I rested a little while. I was gathering moss to make Jack's bed more comfortable, when I heard a queer noise, and came here to the edge of the bluff to listen. It sounded like some kind of an animal roaring, and I was terribly frightened, for I was afraid something was attacking you. I didn't think of moose, but I thought it might be a bear. After a while the noise stopped, but as the time passed and you didn't come, I grew more and more frightened."

"Was that the only time you heard it?"

"No, after it began to grow dark the sound came again, several times, and I thought it seemed louder and fiercer than before."

"He was angry because Ralph dropped the hatchet on him," said Larry.

"Jack was asleep and didn't wake up. Then a long time afterward I heard it once more, but that

time it sounded different. It was a long drawn out sort of bellow, as if the beast were calling."

"That was what he was doing," said Ralph, "before he started to swim across the lake."

It was almost eleven o'clock, and the adventurers, now that the excitement was over, found that they were nearly starved. Jack had waked long enough to eat some bread and butter and cold beans, but Margaret had not been able to choke down a mouthful. She had spent the time collecting moss, bark and what dry branches she could find in the darkness and break off with her hands, and had kept the fire going both as a beacon and to frighten away wild animals. Now she heated the beans in one of the tin boxes, and the older boys ate until she stopped them for fear there would not be enough left for breakfast. Lawrence had spilled almost half of the water he was carrying on his rough trip back to the ridge top, but enough remained for a good drink all around.

Ralph and Larry were too tired to expend much energy cutting branches for their beds. However, they did not think it wise for both of them to sleep at the same time. They remembered the distant howling, though they did not say anything to Margaret about it, and she evidently had heard nothing of the sort. The two lads agreed to take turns keeping up the fire and standing guard. The air was cold up there on the ridge, and rugs and coats

would scarcely have kept them warm without a good fire.

It was after midnight when the campers settled down, Margaret sharing Jack's bed and rug, and Ralph taking first watch. He felt dead tired and had to walk up and down to stay awake. Even then it was hard work to keep from dozing while his feet continued to move. The northern lights, which had begun to fade by the time the boys reached the ridge, were all gone, only a dull glow remaining in the north. Far away beyond the lake he heard the faint howling again. It made him shiver a little when he thought of the expanse of wild, lonely country. Had any white man ever penetrated it? How many miles away was civilization? Would they ever reach it again? What unknown dangers might not lie before them? But nothing disturbed him, except a hare that leaped out from under a bush almost at his feet and fled away in the darkness. At two Ralph called Larry, and went to sleep as soon as he had rolled into his blanket.

VII

THE SLEEPING GIANT

THE explorers were forced to admit next morning that their hastily made beds had been far from comfortable. If the young people had not been so exhausted they could scarcely have slept at all. They would know more about making evergreen beds next time. With the fire at their feet, they had been warm enough, though the smoke had bothered them a little. Tired and disheartened, they were rather inclined to be cross that morning. But their irritability was forgotten suddenly when Ralph, stepping out from the shelter of the jack pine, happened to look off across woods and water. He stood staring for a moment, then shouted to the others.

"Land," he cried, and pointed to the northwest.

The day was bright with a perfectly clear sky and no haze. Away off across the water a dim outline was visible.

"The Sleeping Giant," exclaimed Lawrence, after one glance.

"Do you mean Thunder Cape?" said Margaret.

"Yes, it's the Cape all right."

"But it's in the wrong direction," Ralph protested, "if we're anywhere on the Bay."

"We're not on the Bay." There was a frown of puzzlement on Larry's face. "That's the way the Giant looks when you see him from the open lake, very much the way I saw him from the steamer when I came across from the Sault."

"We came up from Duluth, so we didn't get that view. Seeing the Cape from the Bay side, I never could quite understand why they called it the Sleeping Giant, but from here it does look something like a man lying on his back."

The Sleeping Giant is the name given to the end of Thunder Cape, a hill or mountain rising abruptly from the water some twelve hundred feet. Especially from the lake side, it looks not unlike a gigantic figure stretched out upon the water. By the Ojibwa Indians the place was supposed to be the grave of their hero and god, Menabojou or Michabou, where he lies petrified in stone.

"I think," said Lawrence slowly, "that I know now where we are. Don't you remember that on the maps there's a big island, fifty or sixty miles long, southeast of the Bay, about forty or fifty miles from the Cape?" He was overestimating the distance somewhat. "You pass the end of it coming across from the Sault. I believe that's where we are. In fact I don't see how we can be anywhere else, with the Giant off there."

"I guess you're right," agreed Ralph. "I remember seeing such an island on the map, now you remind me of it. It wouldn't be impossible to get that far from Fort William in a night either, but we must have been running in the wrong direction nearly all the time. Why have they got that fool sign on that building down in the harbor though?"

"I'm not sure it is a fool sign. Have you ever noticed how the boundary line between the Dominion and the States goes through this lake? It runs up from the Sault in a peak almost to Thunder Cape and then down again to the mouth of Pigeon River. That means that this island, if we're where I think we are, must be on the United States side."

"Why, yes," agreed Margaret, "I know now. We studied something about that at school. Don't you remember, Ralph? The boundary line was run up that way, where you wouldn't expect it to go, on purpose to include some islands. Then we're in the United States again."

"I remember something of the sort. The islands were supposed to have valuable mineral deposits, weren't they? But why Michigan? This island must be a part of Minnesota I should think?"

"That I don't know about," Larry replied. "Perhaps your state of Michigan got hold of it first and held on to it. Anyway I'm very sure now where we are."

"Do you know anything about the island? Are there any towns on it?"

"I never heard of any, but I think some of the North Shore boats stop here. We've discovered a fishing camp and a summer resort ourselves."

During breakfast the lads and Margaret debated the question of going forward or back. At first Ralph was in favor of going on, but Lawrence pointed out that, with such rough country to travel over, they could not hope to go the whole length of the island in one day, and their provisions were almost gone.

"It's getting wilder and wilder the farther inland we go," he said, "and if we reached the other end, we shouldn't be any nearer home."

"But we might find people," replied Ralph.

"And we might not," Larry retorted. "The steamers may not land at the south end of the island at all, while we have very good proof that they touch the northern end. If we go on and come out where there is nothing, we'll be in a bad way. I'm in favor of going back where the food is, and waiting there a little longer for a boat or the return of those fishermen. If we have to start out again, we had better go along shore. We won't find either docks or fishing camps in the center of the island."

Margaret agreed emphatically with Lawrence, and Ralph was forced to admit that the others had

the best of the argument. So they resumed their lightened packs, and turned back along the ridge top. The Sleeping Giant remained in view to the northwest, but to the east and southeast not the faintest line of shore could they discern.

It was easy to find the way back, for the signs of their passage were clear enough in most places. The only event of the trip was the discovery, almost in their trail, of the remains of a freshly killed hare, a proof that some wild animal, large enough and fierce enough to kill and eat a hare, had been abroad in the night not far from their camping place. The sight convinced the boys that they had been wise to stand guard.

Going down hill was less laborious than coming up, but the wanderers were decidedly tired when they reached the shore of the bay. They wasted little time putting the boat into the water, and made good speed rowing down the harbor. It was with almost the feeling of getting home that they drew up at the dock below the friendly little cabin.

They were in need of provisions, and anxious to see whether the fishermen had come back, so Larry and Ralph started out again almost immediately. As they approached the camp, Larry cried out joyfully, "They must be back. There are some boxes on the dock."

But the fishermen had not returned. The houses remained locked and empty. Nevertheless,

the three boxes had not been on the dock when the boys had visited the place Sunday evening, and the lads examined them with interest. They were addressed to Knut Thorsen, Smith Harbor, Michigan. How had they come? By boat of course. While the castaways had been traveling inland, a boat of some kind had been into the harbor. By going away they had lost one chance of rescue.

"If we'd only waited a little longer," groaned Ralph.

"Anyway these boxes prove two things," said Lawrence. "A boat comes in here, and Knut Thorsen intends to come back. If he didn't intend to, he wouldn't have supplies sent to him here."

"Maybe," suggested Ralph, "he and all his family were out looking after their nets, got caught in that fog, and were carried away just as we were."

When the two boys reached the cabin, Margaret greeted them excitedly. "I've found out something more about this place," she cried. "We're just where Larry thought we were, and a steamboat comes in here every Monday."

The lads looked at each other. "How do you know?" they demanded in chorus.

Meg handed Lawrence a piece of paper. It was part of a steamboat folder. "Jack found it," she explained. "He took down a book from one of the shelves by the fireplace, and this fell out. It says, you see, that after September 15 there is one

boat a week to this island. It reaches Smith Harbor at 11:45 on Monday. If it's still running, we must have missed it yesterday."

"It's still running all right," and Ralph told her about the boxes on the dock.

Larry was studying the time card. "There is another stop that must be on the island," he said, "only fifteen minutes from here. Then there's still another one more than five hours farther on. I can't tell whether that's at the other end of the island or on the mainland. We must find the place that's only fifteen minutes away. There may be some one left there."

"It's a relief to know we're not clear out of the world," remarked Meg, "but why didn't we have sense enough to stay here!"

The next day Margaret and Jack, who were both very tired, remained on the little island, but Ralph and Lawrence started out after breakfast to search for the other steamer dock. According to the time table, the boat ran up the northwest shore of the lake to Fort William and Port Arthur, and then across to the island. So the next stop after Smith Harbor must be farther along the outer shore. The waves were running too high in that exposed place for the boys to go in the rowboat, but they crossed the point from the fishing camp and set out along the rocks.

In some places they could walk close to the water

on gradually shelving slopes or at the edge of abrupt cliffs. At other times they were forced to go around fissures and holes with inlets and pools, and to climb up and down the steep sides of piled up rock masses.

After about two miles of this kind of travel, the explorers rounded a point, and there, in plain sight, across a little bay, were buildings and a dock. The lads hurried forward, but before they reached the place they felt almost sure it was deserted. They were right. This was evidently another summer resort and the next steamer stop, but every building was locked and there was no sign of life.

According to the folder, the second stop was five hours away, five hours by steamer. There was no use going farther, but the boys found an easier way to return, a well defined track through the woods back from the rocks. This trail brought them out at the fishing station again.

After discussing the matter very thoroughly that evening, the castaways agreed that the best thing to do was to remain quietly in Smith Harbor until next boat day. They must live on Knut Thorsen's supplies of course, but the boys would catch all the fish they could, and not borrow more than was necessary to keep them all properly fed.

The next few days were by no means unhappy ones. It was lonely in that wild place to be sure, but the cottage on Thunder Bay had been lonely too. Both the Elliots and Lawrence were used to depend-

ing on themselves, the cabin was comfortable, the weather unusually good for the place and season, and they were all very confident that the boat would come on Monday and take them away. So they actually enjoyed themselves, fishing, rowing about the harbor, exploring its shores and islands, and scrambling over the rocks.

For Margaret the rocks had a peculiar fascination, and she never grew tired of watching the waves dashing against them, creeping over them, washing in and ebbing out of the holes and crevices. The curious character of the rock, a number of different kinds of stone all mixed together and embedded one kind in another, interested the boys too, though they did not know enough of geology to understand it. Here and there they found flakes and threads of free copper, which made them wonder if there had ever been mines on the island.

The castaways could not entirely shake off a feeling of anxiety, however. Autumn was advancing rapidly towards winter. Scarcely a leaf was left on the birches and aspens, and the squirrels were busily stripping the cone-like seed pods from the alder bushes. Cold weather was but a short way off, and underlying all the thoughts of Margaret, Ralph and Lawrence was eagerness to get back to civilization.

VIII

THE NORTHEASTER

SATURDAY afternoon rain began to fall, and Sunday morning it was coming down hard. The wind blew directly into the harbor, and before evening had risen to a gale. By that time snow and sleet were mingling with the rain, driven with great force before the blast, while the roar of the waves on the rocks beyond the fishing camp could be heard distinctly above the rushing and rattling of wind and sleet in the trees. It was a genuine Lake Superior northeaster.

When Ralph crawled out from under the blankets the following morning, he found the windows sheeted with ice, and the storm still raging, though the wind had shifted a little and was not blowing into the harbor so strongly. The water, however, was rough enough to make the short trip over to the steamer dock unpleasant and even perilous.

Uncertain of the reliability of their watches, the young people arrived at the landing well ahead of time. So chilled that their teeth were chattering, their faces and hands sore from the stinging sleet, they were glad to take refuge in the house and light

a fire in the kitchen stove. Hour after hour passed, the storm did not abate, and no boat came. By four o'clock it was growing dark.

"It begins to look," said Ralph, "as if that steamer would not get here to-day."

"The worst of it is," replied Larry, as he put another stick of wood into the stove, "we don't know, and we don't dare to leave for fear she may come at any minute. It isn't strange that this storm has delayed her, but we can't tell how late she is going to be."

Darkness came and the storm did not lessen. Expecting the fishermen to arrive on the boat, the castaways did not like to take possession of the beds. Jack lay down on a couch, with Larry's rug over him, and Margaret curled up in an old rocking chair, with her own rug wrapped about her. The older boys intended to stay awake, but they soon dozed off in their chairs. No one slept very soundly though, for each was listening, even in his sleep, for the hoarse whistle of the boat.

By morning the rain and sleet had ceased, and the clouds were scudding across the sky, uncovering here and there patches of blue, which gave promise of clearing weather. At breakfast the one topic of conversation was the steamer, but, as the young folk had no means of finding out whether she had merely been delayed or wrecked or disabled, the dis-

cussion did not lead to any conclusion. So they settled down to wait as patiently as they could.

During the forenoon Ralph and Lawrence followed a short trail out to the end of the point, to see how the open lake looked. The path was slippery with rain and sleet, and the evergreens and the bare branches of the birches were sheathed with ice. The lads found the lake very rough, great waves breaking on the confused, piled up heaps of rock and dashing against the perpendicular walls, sending showers of spray clear to the top. Not a boat was in sight anywhere.

By late afternoon they had all about made up their minds that the steamer had skipped a trip. Nevertheless, she might come in the night, and they could not afford to miss her. So Ralph was left to watch while Larry took Margaret and Jack over to the other cabin, returning later to relieve Ralph. The Elliots half expected that, some time during the night, Larry would come for them in haste. However, no summons disturbed their sound sleep.

All the next day the two older boys kept watch, but no steamer appeared. By that time they felt very sure that she would not arrive until her next regular day, but they did not quite dare to give up watching for her. All day and every day for the remainder of the week, the boys were at the fishing camp or on the end of the point or near the harbor

mouth, while every night one of them slept in the Thorsens' house, ready to jump up at any minute to go for the others.

Most of the days were bright with cold nights. The lads had used all the wood they had found in the shed behind the cabin, so they were obliged to gather driftwood from the shores of the points and islands, always keeping a sharp lookout for the steamer.

It was from the outer shore of the last island in the harbor mouth that they first noticed, far across the water, a bit of land with what appeared to be a lighthouse. Anxious to make sure, they lingered at their work of wood gathering until dusk. Then they saw the light flash out and knew their eyes had not deceived them. The fog horn they had heard when they first approached the long point must be at that lighthouse. Just off the harbor mouth there was a bell buoy marking a reef or rock. A light shone from that also.

"Do you suppose they come clear over here to light that buoy?" asked Ralph.

"Oh no," Lawrence replied. "It's like those in Thunder Bay of course. They burn some sort of a gas that generates itself and makes a steady light night and day for several months without the lamp's being touched. I suppose the lighthouse men have to keep an eye on it, but unless an accident should put it out, it takes care of itself."

The two lads tried to guess how many miles separated them from the lighthouse, and wondered how they could reach it. To row across that stretch of open lake would be a perilous undertaking, unless conditions were exactly right. With a launch the crossing might be easy enough in good weather, but gasoline was about the only thing lacking at the fishing camp. Why there was not a supply for the motor boat the boys could not understand, but all they had found was less than a quart at the bottom of a big can.

So the week passed, and boat day came again. The castaways had not the slightest doubt that the steamer would arrive, for the weather had been excellent for several days.

It still lacked a half hour to boat time by their watches, when Ralph said suddenly, "Hark!" Faintly they could distinguish a harsh whistle.

"There she is," exclaimed Larry, "but she's a good way off yet."

The time drew near and passed, and no steamer appeared. When she was about twenty minutes over due, the boys began to grow restless.

"I'm going out to the point," said Ralph. "If she comes while I'm in the woods, I'll hear her whistle, and make tracks back."

Through the woods he hastened, expecting every moment to hear the whistle. He came out on the rocks at the end of the point, but no boat was in

sight. Islands shut out the view of the open lake, so he scrambled up a steep slope to a higher spot. He stood for a moment looking in the direction from which the steamer was due. Then turning, he glanced along the rocky shore. At some distance away he could see a column of black smoke ascending.

In his haste to reach the edge of the height, Ralph almost went over into the lake. He saved himself in time, then stood motionless, gazing. A steamboat was going alongside the outer shore, away from the anxious, waiting castaways.

For a moment Ralph stood stunned and silent. Then he shouted madly, jerked off his cap and waved it about his head, and danced up and down on the rock, in frantic efforts to make that steamer see or hear him. There was no response, and he started to run along the rocks after the departing boat, slipping, scrambling, leaping, waving his arms and shouting with all the force of his lungs. But the steamboat was some distance off, and no one saw his wild signals. At last he came to a standstill on the brink of a yawning gulf, breath, and voice gone, while the boat steamed on, heedless and indifferent.

It was not until he lost sight of her entirely that he gave up, and slowly and dejectedly started to pick his way back along the rocks, which he had cleared so recklessly in his mad pursuit of the boat. What had happened? There was the steamer, almost on

time on her regular day, yet she had not put into Smith Harbor. The only explanation he could think of was that the Captain knew the fishermen were not at their camp, and, having no freight, mail or passengers for the harbor, had not thought it worth while to go in.

It was a downhearted lad who climbed slowly along the rocks, took a shorter trail across to the fishing camp, and joined the others on the dock. There he told his amazing story. The tears came into Margaret's eyes, and she swallowed hard to keep from crying, while Larry's face was a picture of dismay. Only Jack did not seem to mind. He had quite lost his fear of the place, was having a fine time, and saw nothing to be dejected about in the idea of a little longer vacation. What was worrying the others, however, was not so much another week's delay, as the fear that they would not get off even then, the terrible suggestion that they might be left stranded in that lonely place.

With an effort Lawrence pulled himself together and tried to take a cheerful view of the situation. "We won't let that old boat miss us next time," he said. "We'll find some place where she stops, or else we'll get in her track, so she'll have to take us aboard or run us down."

IX

MORE BAD LUCK

“**W**E’VE got to do one of two things,” said Ralph, as the four were eating their noon meal. “We must get out to that lighthouse or else go along the shore the way the steamboat went, and see if we can reach a place where she is still making stops. I’m in favor of trying for the lighthouse. There’s too much wind to make the crossing to-day, but we can be all ready to start early to-morrow.”

Rain that night and the next day prevented the castaways from going in either direction, however. Fate seemed against them, for there was not another good day that week. November had come and was behaving as that disagreeable month is apt to behave in northern countries. Fog, rain, sleet followed one another, and then began all over again. Most of the time the wind blew in a gusty, treacherous way, veering frequently and keeping the lake rough and choppy. To start out in a little rowboat in such weather would be utter folly, and would inevitably lead to swamping or wreck.

By Wednesday afternoon the wood supply was nearly exhausted again. In spite of rain and sleet,

Larry and Ralph were forced to go in search of fuel. The harbor mouth was too rough for them to seek driftwood there, and they did not want to cut any trees on the little island, so, armed with axes, they rowed to the point above the fishing camp. Searching out dead and partly dead trees, for the boys did not like to cut live, sound ones, and, unskilled axmen as they were, felling and cutting them up occupied so much time that darkness had fallen before the two reached the cabin with their boat load.

During the evening meal Margaret was very silent. Once, Lawrence, looking up from his plate, noticed her with her head raised and turned towards the door, as if she was listening intently. On her face was a troubled, almost frightened look.

"What is it, Meg?" he asked.

"Nothing," she replied quickly. "I thought I heard something, but — I guess I didn't." He was about to press his question, when, with a slight shake of her head, she made a motion towards Jack. Larry understood that she did not wish to discuss, before the younger boy, what was troubling her.

After Jack had gone to bed, Lawrence questioned her again. "What's the matter with you to-night, Margaret?" he asked. "Did something happen while we were away?"

"No," she answered hesitatingly, "nothing really happened, but when it was getting dark I thought I heard someone or something prowling around

outside the house. I heard it several times. The first time was before I lighted the lamps, while Jack and I were sitting here by the fire. I thought it was you boys coming up from the dock, but I looked out, and the boat was not there. Then I heard the sounds again by the door. I slipped over and shot the bolt without Jack's noticing, and lighted the lamp. I didn't hear anything more till I was getting dinner, and then I thought someone was prowling around the back door. Just before you came, I heard it a third time."

"A hare or a squirrel probably," said Ralph easily. "You mustn't go to getting nervous about things, Meg."

"It wasn't a hare or a squirrel. I'm almost sure it was human."

"What makes you think so?" Larry asked.

Meg's forehead creased in a puzzled, little frown. "I don't exactly know, but it sounded human somehow, and once I heard a cough, a man's cough, not an animal's."

"Men and animals cough very much alike sometimes," said Lawrence wisely. "It must have been an animal of some kind, nothing but a hare very likely."

"Or else it wasn't anything at all but the wind in the trees and an attack of girls' nerves," put in Ralph unsympathetically.

Meg was silent, and the boys, convinced that she

had been imagining things, dismissed the subject from their sleepy heads.

Just before sunset on Saturday the clouds cleared away. That night there was a hard freeze. Along the shores of the little island, ice formed so thick and strong that the boys had to break it before they could get the boat out. Winter was surely not far away. They debated the advisability of attempting to reach the distant lighthouse, but Margaret, who was doubtful about a trip of four or five miles across the open lake in a rowboat, persuaded them to wait over Monday, and make an attempt to signal the steamer when she came by.

They did not stay at the dock that time, but took up their station on the point beyond the fishing camp. The boat had been running so close to the rocky shore when Ralph had seen her the week before, that he felt sure she must have passed near the end of the point. If he had only reached the place a few minutes earlier, he could certainly have signaled her.

The sky was cloudy, and in that exposed spot the wind was cold and penetrating. To keep them from chilling through, the castaways were forced to gather driftwood and kindle a fire in a sheltered hole. Ralph and Lawrence took turns walking up and down to keep watch, while the others remained by the fire.

Just before noon Lawrence caught sight of smoke rising beyond the outermost islands in the harbor

mouth. "She's coming," he shouted, and the others rushed to join him.

Anxiously they waited for the boat to appear, but the line of smoke moved on to the east. They waited and waited, but no steamer came in sight.

"That must have been some other boat," said Ralph, "a freighter probably, passing the end of the island."

"She certainly wasn't coming this way," Larry replied, "or she would have been here long ago. As you say, it evidently wasn't our boat at all."

"The rest of you had better go back to the fire and warm up," remarked Ralph. "I'll take a turn at standing watch."

Ralph felt very certain that the smoke they had seen did not come from the boat that they were looking for. It was probably some freighter too far off to be signaled. As he walked up and down, he happened to glance southeast, just in time to see, crossing a gap between two of the islands that formed a broken line half a mile or more out from the rocky shore, a steamboat. The boy held his breath a moment, then waved his arms madly. The day was not very clear and he could not be certain at that distance, but he thought the boat resembled the one he had seen the week before. Certainly she was not one of the long, low-lying steel freighters he had watched so often on Thunder Bay.

His shouts brought the others scrambling up from

their hole in the rocks, but, without heeding their frantic signals, the distant boat disappeared behind an island. No one had seen them, probably no one could see them against the rocks and woods so far away.

"Was that our boat, Ralph?" cried Margaret.

"I'm afraid so. At any rate it was a boat. I'm not particular what one takes us off, if we can only make *something* see us."

"Well, that one didn't anyway," replied Lawrence. "In all the time we've been here I've never caught sight of a steamer so close in."

"No, that's what makes me afraid she's the boat that stops at this island. The only ones we've seen before were freighters so far out you could scarcely see them at all, even on clear days."

Discouragement and gloom settled heavily upon the four castaways, but hope was not completely gone, and they did not dare give up their vigil. About an hour later Margaret and Jack returned to the fishing camp to wait, but Larry and Ralph remained on the point until after sunset, though long before that time they had become firmly convinced that the boat they had seen was the same Ralph had tried to stop the week before. The wind was bitterly cold, and when they left the point snow had begun to fall.

Snow was still coming down next morning, big, soft, wet flakes that made the evergreens into Christ-

mas trees, Jack said. To Margaret, Lawrence and Ralph that day was one of the longest they had ever gone through. They felt that their only real hope of getting away from the island before winter set in was to reach the lighthouse. They were impatient to start out at once, but what could they do in a snowstorm so thick that they could not even see that far-away bit of land? They must wait another day.

X

TRYING TO REACH THE LIGHTHOUSE

THE snow ceased to fall before sunset, and another very cold night followed. The morning was bright and still. "This looks like the right kind of a day," said Lawrence, as the four were eating breakfast, "but we can't be certain in this sheltered place. I'll go out to the end of the point and see."

"You'd better hurry then. We don't want to lose any time, if there's any chance of crossing."

"I'll be back before the rest of you are ready to leave."

There was so much ice between the little island and the fishing station that Larry had trouble getting through, but he finally made a landing and hastened out to the point. The lake was smooth as far as he could see, so he hurried back again.

Before he reached the clearing where the buildings stood, he came upon another track in the snow, branching off from his own. He gave a long whistle of surprise and stood staring. The marks were much larger than hare tracks. They looked suspiciously like human footprints.

"What in the world —" he exclaimed. He knew Ralph could not have followed him. There was no boat left on the little island except the one in the shed, and Ralph could hardly have dragged that down to the water alone. Larry was in a hurry, but curiosity triumphed, and he followed the prints. They led through the woods for a little way, and then stopped suddenly at the foot of a spruce. The boy looked about him. Several masses of snow had fallen from the laden branches, but there was no other disturbance of the smooth, white, ground covering. Not even a squirrel track was to be seen. He walked around the tree, making his way with difficulty between it and a bare limbed birch, but he could discover nothing hiding among the branches. He whistled again.

"That's the queerest thing I ever saw," he thought. "Those tracks certainly look like a man's, a man with bigger feet than mine or Ralph's. But where has he gone? Why should he climb that tree? He can't be there still or I could see him. It isn't big enough or thick enough to hide a man. Well, I must get back. There's no time to be wasted."

He retraced his steps, examining the marks as he went. He could not be sure they were a man's foot-prints. If they were not, there must be a large animal of some kind about. They were not moose tracks he was very certain. Moreover, moose do not climb trees. The thing, whatever it was, had

traveled in Larry's own trail. The prints joined it a little above the shore. He traced them far enough to see that they did not come from the water, or from the houses, but from woods beyond. He felt that he dared not take the time to follow the mysterious trail farther.

As he rowed to the little island, Lawrence puzzled over the prints. He remembered Margaret's scare several days before. Had she really heard some one prowling about? He and Ralph had laughed at her. Probably it had been nothing but a hare, or the wind in the trees. She must have decided that her fears had been purely imaginary, for she had said nothing more about them. She, as well as Ralph, would laugh at him for mistaking some tree climbing animal's tracks for a man's. Larry had not been able to clearly identify the marks as shoe prints. In the soft, loose snow, they were too blurred and irregular. He knew, moreover, that where the feet sink far down in soft snow, they are apt to make holes out of proportion to the feet themselves. It was as much the thought of Meg's and Ralph's ridicule as the bustle of getting started on the trip to the lighthouse, that kept Larry from saying anything about the strange footprints.

The day was cold for a long row in an open boat, but the castaways were too anxious to get away to think of discomforts. There was little more than a ripple on the water as they rowed past the point

where they had waited for the steamer and on between the islands that lay beyond, but when they came out from the shelter of the islands, opposite the long, high point, they encountered more wind. The water did not seem rough enough to be dangerous even for so small a boat, so they did not hesitate to pull for the open lake.

Before they were half a mile beyond the end of the long point, however, they realized that the north wind was freshening. It struck them at an angle, and Ralph had to pull harder on his left oar than on his right to keep headed for the distant lighthouse. He rowed with a will, for he had no intention of turning back if he could help it, but he did not appear to be making much headway. The lighthouse seemed to come no nearer.

The wind increased steadily, the waves tossed the little boat about. In his attempts to keep a straight course for the far-away bit of land, Ralph was shipping water frequently, and Larry went to bailing. An unusually big wave swung the bow around. Before Ralph could head it straight, another wave slapped the side and came over.

Pulling with all his power, Ralph succeeded in heading for the lighthouse again, but he could make but little progress. Keeping his course took all his strength, and the water came into the boat faster than Margaret, with the can, and the boys with their caps, could bail it out. Larry paused in his

bailing to glance towards the lighthouse. It seemed no larger than it had appeared from opposite the end of the long point. He looked in the other direction and was appalled to see what a short distance they had come.

In spite of Ralph's efforts, the bow swung around again. Another big wave slapped the side and came over in a deluge.

"Turn her," cried Larry. "Head the other way or we'll be swamped."

Ralph obeyed. "It's no use," he gasped, the water running down his face. "We can't make it."

The wind was steady. There was no indication of storm. In a good motor boat they might have made the crossing without real danger. Even in Lawrence's little launch, with its reliable engine, they would have been safe enough. But for the rowboat the situation was fraught with peril, and, moreover, they were making almost no headway. It must be three or four miles to that lighthouse, and the wind freshening every moment.

They had no choice but to go back, and that was dangerous enough. Ralph did not dare try to head directly for the harbor mouth, for that would involve going at an angle with the waves again. Instead, he allowed them to carry the boat where they would, using the oars merely to keep it with the wind. Margaret received the worst of the spray as the waves broke on the stern, but the water

no longer came into the boat faster than she and Lawrence could bail it out.

The wind carried them directly south, past the end of the outermost island in the harbor mouth. Watching his chance Ralph swung about quickly and pulled for all he was worth for the shelter of that island. He made it, but not before several waves had come into the boat, almost swamping it. Along the lee side of the island, in comparatively smooth water, he rowed the almost water-logged craft, the others bailing industriously. Their first attempt to reach the lighthouse had very nearly ended in disaster, but regret was almost swallowed up in thankfulness at being safe again.

All four were very wet, and had it not been for bailing and rowing they would have chilled through. They were cold enough, in spite of their exercise, by the time they reached the cabin. Larry and Ralph made a big fire in the fireplace, and they all dried themselves as well as they could. Unluckily they had no changes of clothes. Meg was so worried for fear Jack would catch cold that she made him take off his wet things and go to bed.

XI

THE ABANDONED LIGHTHOUSE

THE wind continued to blow hard the next day, but during the night it shifted from north to west. This change of direction did not make crossing to the lighthouse any easier, but it did permit a trip along the rocky shore. The water between that shore and the outlying islands showed scarcely more than a ripple. Inactivity was a torment to the anxious castaways, and they decided to take advantage of the opportunity. They had not given up hope that there might be an inhabited fishing station somewhere on that side of the island.

They stopped at the fishing camp and Ralph landed for a few more supplies. As he went between the two cabins, he was surprised to notice that the glass was broken out of one of the windows in the smaller house. He had never been in that house, for it was locked, but he felt sure that glass had been intact the last time he saw it. He went up to the window and looked into a small bedroom. He could see that the bed was in tumbled confusion. In the other cabin the young folk had found everything neat and in order, but perhaps the people who

lived in this one were not such good housekeepers, and had left the bed unmade. There was the broken glass though. Ralph looked down at the ground under the window. The bright sun of the past few days had melted the snow except in the shadiest and most protected spots. The ground was bare, hard with the frost of the night before, and showed no footprints.

The lad took another look through the window, then went on to the back door of the other house. He had found a key that fitted the padlock, so he had driven the staple in firmly, and carried the key in his pocket. Lawrence had laughed at him for locking up so carefully when there was not apparently a human being for miles around. Ralph thought of that now, as he unlocked the door and went in. Perhaps there was some one near by after all, and he might be starving. It did not seem right to lock him out from those supplies. He must have seen the smoke from their chimney though, and, if he was a castaway too, he would surely have knocked at their door. He could easily have crossed in one of Knut Thorsen's rowboats, which were still in the water. No, there could not be any one around there anywhere. Margaret had thought she heard some one, but it must have been just a girl's imagination.

Nothing in the house was disturbed, and Ralph

took the bacon and cans of milk Meg had sent for, snapped the padlock and returned to the boat. It was queer about that broken glass and tumbled bed, but he decided not to say anything about them. There were all sorts of ways a window might be broken. The others would think *he* was developing nerves.

As the rowboat passed through the narrow waterway between the point and the island where the summer resort was, Jack, who was in the bow, cried out suddenly, "There's a man!"

"Where?" chorused the other three.

"There." He was pointing towards the island. "I don't see him now. It was a man in dark clothes standing just beyond that house, in those trees."

"There's no one there, Jack," said Larry. "You must have been" — He broke off suddenly, then laughed. "I thought I saw him myself, but it was that stump. Do you see?"

"Of course it was," agreed Meg. "It does look a little like some one in dark clothes among the trees."

"It wasn't," insisted Jack. "I saw him move his arm. Then I looked away a second to tell you, and he was gone."

"It must have been the stump, Jack," Ralph replied. "It's easy to be mistaken in a thing like that."

If you saw anything move, it was the branch of a tree or a squirrel jumping."

Jack made no answer, but he did not look convinced.

The four adventurers rounded the point and rowed along the rock shore. The day was fine, with a bright sun and cloudless sky. Sheltered from the wind as they were, they would, but for their anxiety, have thoroughly enjoyed the trip. After they passed the other deserted summer resort, the surroundings were new to them, and they watched eagerly for signs of habitation. As they went on, the shore became lower and less rocky, and the woods grew nearer the water. The outlying islands were larger, more thickly wooded and close enough together to protect the shore and form a real harbor, about as wide again as the one where the castaways had been living.

Mile after mile they rowed, landing twice, once on the main shore to examine two small cabins, and again on an island where stood a larger house. They found all three buildings deserted.

"It's time for me to take another turn at those oars, isn't it, Larry?" said Ralph. "I wonder how far we've come."

"I should think about —"

Lawrence was interrupted by a little cry from Margaret. She was pointing up the bay. The

boys turned their heads. Against the dark colors of the ridge, a white tower loomed.

"A lighthouse," gasped Larry.

The sight of that white tower put joy into the hearts of the explorers, and Ralph pulled hard in his eagerness to reach it. For a time no one spoke. Then Lawrence turned in his seat for another look. As he gazed his face sobered.

"Ralph," he said quietly, "do you see anything strange about that lighthouse?"

Ralph looked over his shoulder. "Why I don't know. It's one of the old fashioned white towers, plastered or cemented on the outside."

"Look at the top."

"I don't see anything queer about that. Why?"

"Maybe I'm mistaken. We're rather far off yet to make sure." And that was all Lawrence would say.

Now and again as they went on, Ralph turned his head to glance curiously at the top of the tower, wondering what Larry had meant. Then suddenly he uttered a sharp exclamation. Lawrence, who had been sitting half turned in his seat with his eyes fixed on the lighthouse, looked at him.

"I was right," he said. "The lamp room is boarded up. That light isn't in use."

"It looks like it, but I don't see how you saw that so far away."

"I noticed," Lawrence replied, "that the sun was shining full on that lamp room, and it suddenly struck me that something looked wrong. The light wasn't reflected as it would be from glass."

"Maybe," said Ralph, "those board shutters are put up in the daytime and taken down at night. I can't see why a lighthouse should be deserted."

"Nor I," Larry answered. "You may be right, though I've seen a good many lighthouses on the Lakes and I never noticed one with shutters on the lamp room."

"The lights can't have stopped burning yet, can they? It isn't late enough in the season."

"The one we tried to reach was shining last night. I went out towards the harbor mouth after dark to see."

Margaret said nothing, but disappointment and anxiety were plainly written on her face.

The tower was not on the right hand shore, but on the end of a point or island to the left. From the bay side of the point a dock extended.

"We'd better land there," said Lawrence.

As they drew near, log buildings came into view.

"Oh," cried Margaret, "it's another fishing camp. There *must* be some one there."

But no one was to be seen. No boats were in sight, and the big reels on the shore stretched out their arms bare of nets. The moment the rowboat touched the dock, Jack jumped out and ran up to the

house. By the time the others had disembarked, he was back again.

"There's no one at home," he said.

"Perhaps they're out looking after the nets." Margaret would not give up hope until she was forced to.

A few minutes of investigation, however, showed that the camp was deserted, the houses locked, the boats put up for the winter.

"They've gone for the season," said Ralph. "I wonder if that steamboat took them off Monday, or perhaps last week when I saw her coming this way."

"She must have come up here for something. Let's try the lighthouse."

They entered the boat again, rowed around a great rock that projected into the lake, and came to a short stretch of pebble beach. The lighthouse stood back from the beach, only a little way up from the water.

"It's closed," said Lawrence, his voice dull with discouragement. "There are shutters on the windows."

"Not on all of them," exclaimed Meg. "Perhaps part of the building is occupied."

It was useless to deny the deserted appearance of the place. Ralph ran the boat up on the beach, the four jumped out, climbed the abrupt, low bank, which had been reinforced with timbers to keep it from

crumbling away, and crossed a bit of open ground sparingly covered with coarse grass. There was no answer to their knocks. They went around the house, and Ralph pounded energetically on the back door.

"The place is closed all right," he said. "Hello, here's the key in the lock. Some one's been careless."

He opened the door and looked into the little kitchen. A rusty stove, a couple of wooden chairs, an old table, and a few cooking utensils were the only furniture.

"We might as well take a look around," he said, and the others followed him in.

From the kitchen a narrow passage led to the tower stair, and on either side of this passage rooms opened. In the corner one was an iron bed with a mattress but no bedding, and in the adjoining room there was a table covered with white oilcloth, several chairs and a fireplace built of native stone. The other rooms were empty of furniture. Some, but not all, of the windows were covered with wooden shutters. Up a winding stairway with worn steps and lighted by narrow windows like slits, then up a short ladder, the disappointed castaways climbed to the lamp room. The lamp and glass had been taken out, and the spaces covered with boards, but a door led to a narrow, railed platform, that ran around the tower. From there the explorers had a fine view

across the tops of the trees at the rear of the lighthouse and out over the lake in the other direction. No more fishing camps or houses were to be seen.

Silently the four went back down the stairs and through the passage to the kitchen. Lawrence was the first to speak.

"This place isn't merely closed for the winter," he said. "It isn't used at all any more, at least not as a lighthouse. If we had come up here before those fishermen left, but now —" He did not finish his sentence.

"Now," said Meg quickly, "we had better have lunch. It's long after time. If you'll make a fire in this old stove, I'll fry some bacon."

The boys tried to respond to her gallant attempt at cheerfulness. In spite of their disappointment, they all ate heartily, and felt better afterwards. Margaret was picking up after the meal, when a shout from Ralph, who had wandered into one of the other rooms, made her drop her work.

"Come and see what I've discovered," he called.

The others found him standing before a large chart that hung on the wall of the room with the fireplace. "See here," he exclaimed. "Here's exactly where we are."

The chart included Thunder Bay with its shores and islands, and the whole of the big island where the castaways were stranded. They found the bay they had first entered, the ridge they had crossed,

the harbor where they had been staying. Lying to the northeast of the long, high point was an island with the lighthouse they had tried to reach.

"Here's the way we came this morning," said Ralph, tracing their course up the outer harbor," "and here's where we are now." He pointed to the words "Lighthouse, Discontinued."

They studied that chart with fascinated interest. It seemed like a connecting link with the rest of the world. They sought for the other boat landing, five hours from Smith Harbor, and found it at the extreme southwest end of the long island.

"We never in the world could get there by row-boat," said Lawrence. "It's at least forty miles and an exposed shore all the way."

"The fishing stations aren't marked though," Ralph suggested. "We may find a live one yet."

Larry shook his head. "I doubt it. It's after the middle of November. I'm afraid the fishing season for this island is over."

"There's a little bay just beyond here," remarked Ralph, pointing to the map, "and another one farther along. Let's row around and see what they're like. They must be well sheltered for they run back into the island."

In neither of the bays did the explorers find any signs of life. The first one, which lay just southeast of the lighthouse point, was less than a half mile long, with steep, rock sides. To reach the second

bay, they were obliged to row along an open shore unprotected by islands, but, with the wind in the southwest, they had no difficulty. This bay cut into the land for a mile or more, and they went clear to the head where a little stream emptied.

The sun was sinking when they came out and the wind had changed. It was now blowing from the south.

"It's no use trying to go any farther to-night," said Ralph, "the wind's against us. We'll have to go back and camp."

The water had roughened, but the wind, striking the stern, helped to take the boat towards the lighthouse. There a tiny rock island partly sheltered the beach.

Entering the old building, the castaways set about making themselves comfortable for the night. The boys took down the iron bedstead, moved it into the room where the fireplace was, and set it up again. This room they assigned to Margaret and Jack. For their own beds they cut evergreen branches and spread them in one corner of the kitchen. While Meg was getting the evening meal, the lads climbed a short stairway that led from the hall near the front door to the upper story of the old house. They glanced into the rooms, but found them bare of furniture of any kind.

Margaret had remembered to bring some candles, so they had light enough to eat by. As there were

only the two steamer rugs for bed covers, the boys made good fires in the fireplace and stove.

The wind which had grown stronger since sunset, howled and whistled around the old building, and the waves kept up a continuous roaring on the rocks beyond. These sounds and the strangeness of her position in the lonely lighthouse made Margaret wakeful for a while. She felt an uneasy fear that there might be some one hidden in those dark, silent rooms. The feeling was foolish she knew, for the boys had found nothing there. So she shook off her uneasiness and sank at last into dreamless sleep, from which she did not wake till Ralph pounded on her door. The morning was gloomy, and she could hear rain beating against the window.

XII

BACK TO THE CABIN

“**W**E can’t go on in this downpour,” said Ralph at breakfast.

The wind was in the east, blowing the rain in violent gusts against the old building. There was nothing for the castaways to do but to make themselves as comfortable as they could. The older boys and Margaret spent most of the day studying the chart and discussing their next move. At first Ralph was in favor of going on along shore. The chart showed a lighthouse less than half way to the other end of the island, and he suggested that they try to reach it. Lawrence shook his head doubtfully.

“That lighthouse is about twice as far from here as we came yesterday,” he said. “All the way is along an unsheltered coast too, without even an outlying island for protection. We couldn’t reach it unless the wind was in the west and stayed there. If it shifted, and you know how often it does shift on this lake, we’d have to land, if we were near a place where we could land. Even if we succeeded in making a landing, there’s no knowing how long we might be storm bound without food or shelter.

We might have to walk clear back to Smith Harbor. How do you think we could do that without anything to eat? Suppose we were lucky enough to reach a place along shore opposite that lighthouse, we should have to cross about three miles of open water to get to it."

"Does it lie that far out?"

"Almost three, according to the scale on the chart," Larry replied, after measuring carefully. "It seems to me that we stand a much better chance of reaching the light off the northeast end of the island. It's nearly as far from here to be sure, but we have fairly well sheltered water to the point, and then Knut Thorsen's supplies to keep us while we're waiting for good weather. We might be stranded on the shore down there and wait for a week for the wind to let us go that three miles."

"Perhaps we could signal the lighthouse people to come for us."

"No more easily than we could in the other place. It's almost as far from the shore out to that light as it is from the end of the long point to the other one."

They discussed the subject from every angle without reaching a conclusion. In the meanwhile, the storm continued, and before evening the rain had turned to sleet.

When Margaret, chilled and stiff from sleeping on a bare mattress with only her rug over her, looked

out of the window next morning, she found that the rain had ceased, but the weather had not cleared. The wind still blew from the northeast, the sky was cloudy, the water a sullen gray except where the crests of the waves broke in foam.

"Not much prospect of going on to-day," said Ralph, when she joined the boys in the kitchen. He and Lawrence had been out to look at sky and water.

"We can't go back either until the wind changes or goes down," added Larry. "The bay is rough."

"We only brought food enough for three days." Meg looked very grave. "We'd better put ourselves on half rations to leave something for to-morrow."

Though going in either direction by water was out of the question, the castaways were restless. The boys cut up some driftwood for fuel, but after that task was done they could not settle down to inaction. Following a trail through the woods, Ralph and Lawrence went over to the fishing camp. From there they scrambled along the shore of the point far enough to get a view of the head of the bay. The place was utterly wild, woods and rocks, with some low ground and a patch of rushes.

After a scanty lunch, the four set out along the shore in the opposite direction. On the northwest side of the little bay they had visited the day before, was a ridge, and, extending along it like a road, a

rock clearing bordered by evergreen forest. This natural path they followed to the head of the bay and beyond for a little way, where the rock ridge penetrated a swamp. The swamp lay on both sides of them, a dense tangle of standing tamaracks, spruces and big arbor vitæ or white cedars, fallen and decayed trunks and undergrowth. It was a wild lonely place, savage and gloomy under the dull gray sky. The explorers were glad to turn back from it. Even the wave battered rocks of the shore seemed friendly by comparison.

By the time the four reached the lighthouse again, the clouds had broken and the sun was coming through. The prospect of getting away next day was more encouraging, but there was no longer any question which way they should go. They had not the provisions to go on. They must turn back. That day was Sunday. To-morrow would be boat day again. The steamer they had seen the week before had been coming in this direction, although she was running outside the islands. Would she come again to-morrow? Would it not be best to wait until after time for her? She was not likely to put in to the fishing camp, but might it not be possible to signal her from the tower? The subject furnished material for discussion all that evening.

Monday morning dawned clear and still and cold. There was much ice in the harbor above the fishing camp. Except for the ice, the day was favorable

for the return trip, but the castaways had decided to remain until afternoon, in the hope of signaling the steamboat. Even if the wind came up in the meantime, it was not likely, they thought, to shift to east or northeast so soon after the clearing of the skies. It might blow hard from the west or even from the north without interfering much with their row down the harbor.

Lawrence and Ralph spent most of the morning on the balcony at the top of the tower. With the aid of the chart, they had figured that, if it took the steamer five hours, including stops, to go from Smith Harbor to the dock at the southwestern end of the Island, it could not possibly take her an hour to come from Smith Harbor as far as the old lighthouse. Lawrence argued, however, that at this time of year she could not be expected to run close to schedule, and might even be far ahead of time.

The forenoon passed slowly. Several times the watching boys caught sight of distant lines of smoke across the water to south or east or northeast, so far away that the boat was either not visible at all, or showed merely as two apparently disconnected specks, the high bow and stern of a long, steel freighter. Once they could just distinguish a sailing vessel, one of the old four-masters so seldom seen nowadays on the Great Lakes.

At two o'clock they gave up their watch. If they were to take advantage of the good weather, and

reach Smith Harbor before dark, they must start at once. They no longer had any thought of going on. Lunch had consisted of a very small portion of corn-meal mush with a little canned milk. They had not dared to eat quite all of their provisions, for fear something might prevent them from getting back to their storehouse that night.

Everything in the old lighthouse was left in good order, the boys being especially careful to scrape every ember and bit of ashes out of the stove and fireplace.

"Shall I leave this key in the door as I found it?" asked Ralph.

"I suppose you might as well," Lawrence replied. "I don't know, though. It might rust in the lock. Better put it on the table and leave the door unlocked. Someone might be wrecked along this shore and be looking for shelter."

The trip down the harbor was almost without incident. In spite of the bright sun, the day was cold, but the water was smooth almost to the point. There a choppy sea was troublesome, but not really dangerous. The sun had set and it was growing dark when Ralph and Lawrence climbed out of the boat at the fishermen's dock.

Ralph unlocked the door of the house and the two went in and lighted a hand lamp. In the store-room Ralph looked about him in perplexity. Surely some

one had been in there since he was there last. He did not leave that sack of potatoes untied, or spill those beans on the floor. He could not be sure that anything was missing, for he had never counted the hams and sides of bacon or the canned things. He tried to remember whether he had pried the cover off that box of prunes. Either he or Larry must have done so, for they had used some prunes, but had they left the cover, broken and splintered, lying on the floor? The box was nearly empty. They had not taken that many prunes, he was sure.

Ralph said nothing to Lawrence, who was picking out the things Margaret had told them to get, but, after lighting a candle, he proceeded to examine the rest of the house. He expected to find a broken window, but a glance showed him that all were intact. The beds had not been disturbed. The drawer of a dresser was open, but Meg might have been looking for something she needed, and have left it that way. He had just concluded that everything was as it had been, when he felt a draft of sharp air and noticed that one of the windows was open about an inch at the bottom. If any one had entered the house, he must have come in that way. Ralph closed the window, which had no lock, and returned to the store-room.

"How do you suppose that sack got opened and those beans spilled?" he asked Larry.

"I suppose you did it the last time you were here," the latter answered. "You were in a hurry, you know."

Ralph did not reply directly, but asked another question. "Do squirrels eat prunes?"

"Why I don't know, but I shouldn't be surprised. Red squirrels will eat almost anything that comes their way. Why?" And Larry shot him a quick glance.

"Oh I thought that prune box looked as if something had been into it. There may be rats in the house."

"Perhaps it was Jack's man," replied Lawrence, laughing.

"Stumps don't eat prunes. I'm sure of that," Ralph retorted.

Nothing more was said as the two gathered up the supplies and returned to the boat, Ralph locking the door as usual. When they landed at the little island, Larry hurried to the house with Margaret, while Jack remained behind to help Ralph unload the boat and pull it up on shore.

"Well," said Meg, as she glanced around the living-room, after Lawrence had lighted the lamp. "I thought I left this room in better shape. I must have been in a hurry to get away, to leave things tumbled about on the shelves like that. I told Ralph to be sure to take those ashes out of the fireplace,"

she added, "but he must have forgotten to do it." She went on into the kitchen.

Lawrence kindled a fire, using some bark and wood they had left in the wood box. There was less of it than he expected to find. Then he took the lamp and went into the bedroom that he shared with Ralph and Jack. He felt vaguely uneasy, he did not know why.

"Ralph must have been in a hurry Friday," he thought, "to leave ashes on the hearth and his cot unmade." Larry heard Margaret in the next room, and remembered that he had not lighted the kitchen fire. "I'm coming, Meg," he called, and went into the living-room. Meg was not there. The front door stood half open. "It must have been Jack I heard," he thought. He closed the door and went into the kitchen. "Did Jack come in?" he asked.

"No," replied Margaret.

"Did you go out the front door for anything?"

"No," she answered again, in surprise. "Why?"

"I thought I heard some one going out or coming in just now when I was in the bedroom," he explained. "Of course I was mistaken."

Just then Ralph hammered on the back door. Meg opened it, and the two boys came in with their arms full. Lawrence slipped back into the living-room and shot the bolt on the door. He was thinking of the tracks that looked like a man's. He took

the lamp and looked into Margaret's bedroom, then into his own again. Evidently he saw nothing to disturb him, for he set the lamp on the table and went back to the kitchen. He was just in time to hear Meg ask, "Did you rummage these kitchen shelves for anything before we left Friday, Ralph?"

"No, of course not."

"I thought I left them in better order. I must have been a little crazy that morning I think."

XIII

THE LIGHTS GO OUT

THAT night was very cold, and the castaways woke next morning to find themselves frozen in. From their island across to the shore and as far down the harbor as they could see, the ice extended, but investigation proved that it was not strong enough to bear their weight.

"It's just our luck," exclaimed Ralph. "This is a good day to cross to the lighthouse, but we'll have to smash a way for the boat through all that ice. We've got to make the attempt though."

Before starting out, the boys decided to cross to the point to see how the water looked from there. With an ax they cut out the thicker ice around the boat. Then each took an oar, and, one in the bow, the other in the stern, they attempted to break up the thin ice and to paddle along.

They had gone but a short distance, when Ralph, who was standing in the bow, reached too far with his oar, just as Larry sent the boat ahead suddenly. Ralph lost his balance and went head first over the side, nearly capsizing the boat. Hampered by his heavy clothes and numbed with the chill of the icy

water, he could neither swim to shore nor climb into the boat without overturning it.

In an instant Larry realized that there was only one way to save his friend, to row back to the island, while Ralph clung to the boat. Fortunately Ralph had held on to his oar. Larry secured it and, ordering Ralph to "Hold fast," he pulled with all his strength. It was but a few strokes to shore, and they had cleared a waterway. Nevertheless by the time they reached the dock, Ralph was so numb all over that Larry had all he could do to drag him from the water, get him to the house, and strip him of his dripping clothes.

Vigorously he rubbed the body and limbs of the almost frozen boy, while Margaret heated his cot with flatirons wrapped in papers.

"He ought to have some sort of a hot drink," she said anxiously, after Ralph was tucked under the blankets.

"Make some strong tea," suggested Lawrence, "and give it to him as hot as he can swallow it. Some arctic explorers never use any other stimulant."

"I know," replied Meg quickly. "I've heard Uncle Frank tell of giving it to men who were nearly frozen. There's some in the kitchen."

Thanks to the prompt action of Lawrence and Margaret, Ralph suffered no bad effects from his plunge into the bitterly cold water. He insisted

that his clothes be dried at once, so that the trip across to the lighthouse might not be delayed more than a few hours.

Although Lawrence hung Ralph's clothes so close to the fire that he nearly scorched them, it was afternoon before they were ready to be worn. Meanwhile Larry had crossed to the fishing camp, making his way very carefully, and had gone out to the point. He had found the prospect favorable.

The day was so cold that the sun made little impression on the ice. With four in the boat, breaking a way through was hard work. By the time they reached open water beyond the point, the sky was clouding over and a gusty wind was blowing. Before the outermost end of the last island was passed, they knew it was useless to try to go farther. The sky was dark with clouds, the wind was blowing in gusts shifting from north to northeast and back again in treacherous uncertainty, the water was choppy and snow was beginning to fall. Thoroughly disheartened, they made their way back to the little cabin, chilled and miserable.

The next morning snow was still coming down, the fine, dry snow of cold weather. Another week of November remained, but the harbor had taken on a truly wintry appearance. In the afternoon the snow ceased falling, and a sharp wind from the northwest blew away the clouds. By the following day the ice was firm from island to shore. To make

a way through it for the the boat would be difficult indeed. The wind was still blowing briskly, but it lessened towards evening, and hope rose again in the castaways' hearts.

Just as the sun was sinking, Lawrence said to Ralph, "Come out to the end of the long point with me, won't you?"

"What do you want —" began Ralph, then glanced at his friend quickly. "All right," he said. "How are we going to get there?"

"We'll try crossing to the summer resort island, then from there to that island to the left of it, and over to the point. If the ice is strong enough to hold us that far, we can keep on close to shore."

Telling Margaret they might be late for the evening meal, the two boys went out. By walking carefully and testing the ice ahead before they trusted it with their full weight, they managed to reach the long point. With the exception of a short stretch where the point was not protected by islands, and where they were obliged to scramble along rocks and stony beaches, they found the ice firm along shore almost to the end.

Darkness had fallen when they reached the end of the point. The night was clear without fog or haze. Eagerly they gazed towards the lighthouse. No light was to be seen either there or in the direction of the bell buoy. For more than an hour the lads waited in the clear, cold, winter night. They

tramped up and down, swinging their arms to keep warm, and turning again and again in the direction of the lighthouse, hoping to see the lamp shine out. All was darkness. The only light came from the stars and the pale glow of a faint, white aurora in the northern and western sky. The lamps were out, the keepers had been taken back to shore in the lighthouse tender. It was of no use to try to cross now.

"It can't be that all the lights on the lake go dark as early as this," said Ralph.

"No, the closing of navigation varies a good deal in different places, and of course it comes at different times, in the same place, according to the weather."

The two boys turned their backs on the harbor mouth, and started on the long, cold tramp to the cabin. They had two miles or more to go, but they scarcely spoke all the way. Each one was struggling with the appalling thought of the long months of hardship before them. The loneliness and desolation of the silent harbor lay heavy on them, and the occasional, wailing cry of an owl somewhere in the dark woods, the only sound that broke the stillness, added to their sense of depression.

Margaret had guessed what their errand was, and one look at their faces as they entered the cabin told her that the light was out. She did not say much, but bustled about, getting the delayed meal ready.

Under the influence of the hot food and the cheerful, crackling fire, the feelings of discouragement and despair wore off somewhat. After their long waiting and anxiety, there was indeed a certain sense of relief in the fact that the question of rescue or escape seemed definitely answered. They had done their best to get away. A forty mile trip in a small rowboat across the wintry lake was not to be considered at all. There was just a chance that a freighter might be signaled. The boats did not all cease running when the going out of the lights gave notice of the official closing of navigation and the canceling of all insurance. The boys decided to put up some sort of a signal on the high point, and then to turn their thoughts and energies to making themselves as comfortable as possible.

"We don't want to think about the loneliness and all that," said Lawrence. "We'll have work enough to do to keep warm and fed, and we must stop worrying about what is going to happen to us, and take things as they come. After all, we aren't in nearly so bad a case as we might be, thanks to Knut Thorsen."

"That's certainly true," Margaret replied bravely. "There's plenty of food, and that's the main thing. It won't be more than four or five months till the boats are running again, and that isn't so awfully long."

"We'll come through all right if we don't lose our

nerve," Ralph added. "This cabin is comfortable, and fuel is easy to get. We'll make our clothes last somehow, if we have to dress in the blankets."

"You're always talking about adventures," put in Jack, who had been listening intently. "I guess we're having them now."

"We sure are," his brother agreed. "We're in for a mighty big one. So it's no use whining about it. I'm dead sleepy, and I'm going to bed this minute."

The others followed his example, and, somewhat to their surprise, they all slept soundly and almost dreamlessly.

XIV

PREPARING FOR WINTER

THE boys had found a good sized United States flag in the cabin, and they decided to raise it as a signal. So the next morning they went back to the end of the long point, and selected a tall, straight spruce that stood isolated and conspicuous. Ralph, with a rope tackle wound around his waist, climbed the tree, hacked off the branches near the top, attached his tackle, and worked his way slowly down, cutting the limbs as he descended, until he had sufficient bare trunk to display the signal to advantage. Then Larry, carrying the flag, climbed to where Ralph was resting on the highest branch he had left uncut. Together they attached the flag upside down, and ran it up as a signal of distress. That done, they nailed a board, with a message painted on it, to a stump near by.

A passing steamer, seeing the inverted flag, might send a small boat to investigate, and the boys did not doubt that, if their message were found, every attempt would be made to rescue them. There was not a captain who sailed the lake who would not realize what is meant to be stranded in such a place for

the winter, not one cruel enough to turn his back on any one in such a predicament. The only question was would their flag be seen from close enough in to be recognizable as a distress signal. The appeal Ralph had painted on the board read: "Stranded on an island near the fishing camp up the harbor, Margaret, Ralph and Jack Elliot, and Lawrence Kingsley. Please come and take us off."

When the boys reached the cabin again, they found Jack looking distressed and somewhat sullen. "The little hatchet's gone, Ralph," he said. His tone sounded defiant.

"Gone? What's the meaning of that, Jack? Did you lose it?"

"I'm afraid he's been very careless, Ralph," put in Margaret.

"I haven't either. It wasn't my fault."

"How did it happen, Jack? Own up," said Ralph sternly.

"Meg wanted some water, and I took the hatchet and the pail and went down to cut a hole in the ice. I had it cut all right when I heard a squirrel and a woodpecker making a great racket in the big cedar. I laid the hatchet down and went to see what they were up to. When I got back the hatchet was gone."

"Is that all there is to the story? Didn't you drop that hatchet down the hole?"

"I never did. I laid it on the ice."

"On the ice? Where? Close to the hole?"

"Not very close. It couldn't have slipped in. Somebody took it."

"Nonsense, Jack. You know that couldn't happen. You haven't told me the whole story."

"Yes, I have, except, —" he hesitated.

"Except what? Out with it."

"The hole," Jack went on, "was bigger when I got back."

"Bigger? You mean the ice was thin and the hatchet had broken through."

"No, the ice was thick. I could walk all around on it. The hole had been chopped bigger, and the hatchet was gone. Somebody took it."

"How about the pail?"

"That was there all right."

Ralph picked up his cap. "Show me the place," he said.

Jack led his brother down the path, and pointed to an irregular hole in the ice close to shore.

"I made it almost round," he said, "but when I came back it was like that, all cut out on one side."

Ralph examined the hole. The ice was firm, but, on the side Jack had indicated, it had been cut or broken off irregularly as if some one had given it a hasty hack or two. Ralph remembered the broken glass, the open window, the spilled beans and missing prunes. He looked about for tracks, but Larry had swept the ice at that place clean of snow the day

before, to test the thickness and to cut a water hole. Ralph could find no footprints that the boys might not have made themselves.

He turned to the younger boy again. "Jack," he said gravely, "are you telling me the whole truth?"

"Of course I am, Ralph," the latter replied indignantly. "You *know* I *never* told you a lie."

"No, I know you don't lie." Jack was quick-tempered and sometimes self-willed, but his older brother had never known him to be untruthful. "I think," Ralph said finally, "that when you cut that hole you must have weakened the ice on this side, split or cracked it. Then you dropped the hatchet on it and the weight broke it out, and the hatchet went to the bottom. You didn't mean to do it of course, but you must be more careful. That hatchet is a real loss to us. Don't lay things down on the ice after this."

"I won't," Jack promised, "and I'm awfully sorry about the hatchet, but," and he looked down at the hole with a doubtful expression, "I don't see how it could break through that thick ice."

There was much work to be done in the next few days. With the prospect of spending the winter in that forsaken place, the castaways must make everything ready for a long siege of cold weather. First, all the vegetables and canned goods that freezing might injure must be moved from the fishing camp

to the cabin on the island. "I'm afraid some of them may have frozen already," said Margaret. "We must move them to-day."

"We could get them over here in a quarter of the time if we had some sort of a sled," remarked Ralph. "We'll have to fix up something."

The best they could do was to nail a couple of barrel staves to the bottom of a packing box. These wooden runners were but poor substitutes for iron shod ones, and the clumsy sled pulled heavily and awkwardly, but it was better than nothing. By means of it they transported to the cabin all the potatoes, onions and carrots, the canned goods and some of the other provisions. The bulk of the things that cold would not injure they left at the fishing camp, taking enough, however, to supply them for about two weeks. The cans Meg found room for in the kitchen, but the sacks of vegetables she put in her bedroom. "They want to be where they won't freeze," she said, "but if they're kept too warm they'll wilt and spoil."

At her suggestion the three made an inventory of all the food supplies. Some of the things were not just to their liking, but they did not feel like complaining about that. Sharp air and much exercise gave them such hearty appetites that almost anything eatable was welcome. There were sacks of flour, white, graham, and rye, corn-meal, a quantity of dried beans and peas, sugar, salt, molasses,

corn syrup, pork, bacon and several hams, prunes and other dried fruit, and various kinds of canned goods, including an abundance of canned milk. The boys hailed with joy some glasses and jars of home-made raspberry jam, highbush cranberry jelly and canned blueberries.

To make the little, four room cabin as warm as possible, they chinked every hole and thin place between the logs with moss and clay thawed over the kitchen fire. The stove and fireplace heated the kitchen and living-room. The bedrooms must go unwarmed. There was a good supply of bedclothes in the cabin and more at the fishing camp, but the boys, who slept on spring cots without mattresses, had found that the cold came through from underneath. Ralph conceived the idea of covering the springs with a layer of wrapping paper strewed thickly with twigs of balsam and arbor vitæ, the flat sprays of which were conveniently shaped. With more papers above the evergreens, then a heavy comfort and blankets, the lads found their cot beds warm and comfortable. A blanket doubled over the foot and fastened with safety pins to upper and lower covers made the bedding almost as snug as a sleeping bag.

The most serious lack was clothes. As autumn anywhere on Lake Superior is a sharp and chilly season, the young people were wearing, when carried away in the fog, woolen underwear. The boys had

on flannel shirts and warm suits, Jack a sweater in addition, and Margaret a wool skirt, a flannel waist much like the boys' shirts, and her winter coat. But of course they had no changes.

"I wonder if there is anything at that fishing camp we can wear," said Ralph. "Our under things won't ever last through, and I, for one, don't care much for this having to stay in bed while your clothes are washed."

Search of the bedrooms in the larger house brought to light four warm and only slightly worn flannel shirts, two oilskin slickers, two pairs of old trousers and two old coats that smelled strongly of fish, several pairs of woolen socks and two suits of heavy underwear. The fishy, old coats and trousers the boys rejected, and the socks they found much too big. The shirts, though a little large, they could wear.

"I'll cut one of these down for Jack," said Meg. "We've taken possession of so many of the Thorstens' things we might as well go on."

"We'll pay them double for everything if necessary," Lawrence replied. "These things are worth much more than that to us."

"You'd better use one of these shirts yourself, Meg," Ralph suggested.

"I guess I'll have to. I can fit it down a little. There's only one warm dress here, and I don't think I could wear it, it's so much too big."

"How about underwear for you and Jack?"

"There's one suit I can use. Maybe I can make something for Jack out of a blanket. The socks and stockings are the worst. They're all so much too big."

A few minutes later the boys heard her exclaiming with delight. She had found a large box of wool yarn. An old lady, who had lived next door to the Elliots two years before, had taught Margaret to knit, and she had made several pairs of socks for her uncle, besides mittens and a knitted cap for Jack. The needles were in the box, so Meg, finding she had not forgotten how, set to work at once to knit the mittens that the boys said they wanted first.

At the fisherman's the lads found also a pair of long, Norwegian skis and two pairs of snowshoes, one smaller than the other. There were a huge pair of fur gloves and two pairs of heavy moccasins, much too big for the boys, but which they thought they might use for snowshoeing. "Maybe we can stuff them out with something," suggested Ralph.

For fear that storms or deep snow might interfere with wood cutting Lawrence and Ralph decided to lay in a good supply. They had determined not to cut any trees on the little island unless absolute necessity compelled them, but from the forest on the long point a few would not be missed.

"We don't need to take any live, healthy trees,"

said Lawrence. "We can find plenty of dead, partly dead or broken and stunted ones."

Before their arrival on the island neither lad had ever cut down a tree, but necessity is a good teacher and they soon learned to handle their axes and to gauge the falling of the trunks. Felling trees, cutting them up and pulling the heavy loads of wood across the ice and snow in the clumsy sled was hard work, however, and stiff and aching muscles, as well as hearty appetites, were the result.

XV

A MYSTERIOUS THIEF

FOR several days after the boys discovered that the lighthouse was dark, the weather remained cold. Then a warmer spell set in. The snow melted and the ice softened until it was dangerous to cross. For a time the castaways were marooned on their little island. Luckily they were well supplied with food and fuel.

After a few days of mild weather and a hard rain, so much open water appeared that Ralph and Lawrence decided to take out the boat again. They were anxious to catch some fish, for they were getting tired of salt meat. Making their way beyond the summer resort island, they fished for several hours with good results.

As they were going back, Lawrence said suddenly, "Ralph, there's something, a big animal or a man, on that island."

"You must be seeing Jack's stump."

"No, I'm not. I distinctly saw something move among those bushes."

"Let's land and investigate."

They tramped about the island without finding

anything unusual. Then, as they went around to the back of one of the houses, Ralph gave a shout, sprang forward, picked up something and held it out towards Lawrence.

"A hatchet," exclaimed the latter.

"*The hatchet, our hatchet,*" Ralph answered.

"Are you sure?"

"I guess I know that handle."

The moose had stamped on the hatchet, when Ralph dropped it out of the birch, and had broken the handle. Ralph had been obliged to whittle out a new one. There was no mistaking that crude piece of workmanship.

"Then the little chap was right. Some one did take it."

Ralph nodded, then glanced up at the window under which he had picked up the hatchet. "See here," he exclaimed.

The window was raised, and on sash and sill were marks indicating that it had been pried open. Without hesitation he climbed in, Lawrence following. They found themselves in a small, three room-cabin, two bedrooms with a living-room between. There was no one in hiding there, but the place was in confusion, bedclothes in the middle of the room, chairs overturned, the living-room lamp broken.

"Some one has ransacked the place," Ralph said.

"Of course. He pried open the window with

the hatchet. But why did he leave it on the ground?"

"Something must have frightened him. He dropped it and ran."

"I wonder if it really was a man that Jack saw."

"It looks like it. This isn't the only house that has been entered either." Ralph told of the smashed glass and tumbled bed in the smaller cabin at the fishing camp, and of the open window in the larger one.

Lawrence responded with the tale of the mysterious tracks, and then spoke of the signs of disorder he and Margaret had found in the cabin. "I thought I heard some one go through the living-room too, after I went into the bedroom," he said, "and I found the front door open. I'm certain Meg closed it when we went in."

"There must be somebody sneaking around here," declared Ralph, "but why doesn't he come out in the open and show himself? If he's stranded and hungry, we're willing to go shares with him. What's he afraid of anyway?"

"I don't know," Larry replied. "His sneakiness goes to prove that he's here for no good purpose. Yet I don't see what he can be about in a place like this. After all, Ralph, do you suppose it can be an animal of some kind?"

"Would an animal steal a hatchet and pry a window open with it?"

"Some sort of a thieving animal might carry off a hatchet or anything else it came across I suppose," answered Larry doubtfully. "Perhaps the window wasn't pried. Those marks may have been made in some other way. We haven't found anything else suspicious on this island."

Another surprise was waiting for the lads when they reached the boat. Their catch of fish was gone.

"He's on this island somewhere," cried Ralph excitedly, "and now he's got our fish."

Once more they searched the place from end to end. They were not able to get into any of the other buildings, but they went around them all, looking for traces of the thing, man or beast, that had stolen their fish. The search was fruitless. Not a sign of anything did they find but some indistinct tracks in a soft place in the trail around the island, and those they might have made themselves. They gave up at last and returned to the boat.

It was after noon, but, reluctant to go back without any fish, they remained out until they had caught two more.

"There's no use saying anything to Meg and Jack yet," said Ralph. "It would only frighten them. I'll just hide this hatchet until we find out what that thing is and what it's up to. I wish we could drop Meg a hint though, to keep the doors locked when we're not there."

"I think she has been doing that," Larry replied, "ever since that night when she thought she heard some one prowling around. I know every time I've reached the house first after we've been out, the doors have been locked and I've had to knock."

"That's right," Ralph agreed, "and she usually sings out, 'Is that you, boys?'"

The thaw and milder weather lasted less than a week. Then it turned cold, the harbor froze over once more, and the boys had to do their fishing through the ice. They cut several holes six or eight inches across, and lowered lines baited with bits of pork. As it was cold work standing still holding the lines, they tried a plan Larry had read of. He tied the end of a line to a stick a couple of feet long. Another stick he fastened crosswise to this, not in the middle, but nearer the end to which the line was attached. Then he laid the sticks across the hole, both ends of the cross piece and the longer end of the stick to which the line was fastened resting on the ice. When a fish tugged at the line, the longer end of the stick was pulled up. To make a still better signal, he tied a bit of cloth to the long stick. With this device, he could set several lines, and walk about, trusting to the raising of a stick with its attached flag to show him when he had a fish.

The fishermen did not always have good luck. Sometimes they would watch several holes for an hour or two without a bite. Even when they did get

a bite, they did not always succeed in landing the fish. After cutting holes in various places, they finally found two spots, one up the harbor and the other out towards its mouth, where the fishing seemed best. They tried leaving the lines out over night, but they were robbed several times, the lines cut or gnawed off or carried away, sticks and all. The lads decided that it would not do to risk losing all their tackle, and adopted the plan of never going out of sight of the holes when the lines were set. Whether the thefts were the work of the same man or beast that had carried off the hatchet they could not tell. Any predatory animal might have stolen the fish.

The boys had thought of taking the rest of the supplies from the Thorsens' house to their own cabin, but they had little room to stow away anything more. So, instead, they fastened the door between the store-room and the kitchen with a strong bar of wood, resting in sockets made by bending thin strips of iron, drilling holes in them and screwing them to the door casing on either side. There was a tool chest among the fisherman's things and in a box in one of the sheds they found some scraps of old iron. Remembering the broken glass in the other house, they made a stout wooden shutter to cover the one window of the store-room and nailed it on. They could use a candle or lantern when they came for supplies.

"Now," said Ralph, when they had completed their defenses, "it would bother a man or animal to get in here. I don't like to shut any one out who may be in need of food, but if he is hungry, he can come over to our island and show himself like an honest man."

With some thin boards, such as are used for repairing boats, Lawrence and Ralph attempted to build a toboggan. By steaming the boards over the wash boiler, they succeeded in bending the ends in a slight curve, not rounded enough for the real toboggan shape, but sufficient to prevent the front of the sled from cutting into the snow. Cleats fastened with screws held the boards together, and Ralph gave the whole a thorough coating of oil. The toboggan was a rather crude affair, but serviceable, not very heavy to pull, and far better for carrying wood and supplies than the packing box sled.

After a fresh fall of snow, the lads and Margaret undertook to learn to use the snowshoes. Walking with the clumsy things proved more of a trick than it looked to be, and a great deal of practice was necessary before the young people became at all skilful. Tumbling around in the snow did not hurt them though, and they kept on trying, laughing at one another's mishaps. The worst result was the straining and laming of their feet, ankles and legs, until they learned to manage the shoes, and their muscles became accustomed to this new form

of exercise. Because Ralph and Jack had used skis, they succeeded in keeping their balance and getting ahead before Lawrence did, while Margaret was slowest of all. In time though she became as expert as the boys.

Meg had the housework, cooking and mending to do, but the boys helped when they could. Washing their clothes, a kind of work she had never had to do at home, was her most unpleasant task, but she went at it bravely each time, thankful, she said, that they had some clothes to wash.

There were a few books in the cabin, some novels, several books of travel, one on animal life, a botany and a geology. All but the last two, the older boys read aloud, a chapter or two each evening to make them last as long as possible, while Margaret kept busy with her knitting.

When everything is taken into consideration, the first few weeks of real winter were by no means uncomfortable or unhappy, for the castaways were trying to make the best of things, and not to think of their loneliness.

Of their suspicions that a human being of some sort was in their neighborhood, the older boys said nothing to Margaret and Jack. They kept their eyes open for the creature, however. Once they found some tracks that they felt sure could only have been made by a human foot in a shoe. At that time there was little snow on the ground, and the ice was

practically clear. The tracks began on the shore above the fishing camp, continued through the woods and across the point. There, where the rocks had been swept bare by the winds, the boys lost the trail and could not pick it up again. Neither were they able to trace the steps in the other direction over the ice. Those tracks were the only trace of anything human that they could discover. As time went on, they began to believe that the sneaking man had left that part of the island.

XVI

CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS all alone in the wilderness! It made the young folk feel lonely even to think of it, but they determined to have as merry a Christmas as they could. As soon as they were well started on their preparations they grew so interested that they almost forgot to be lonesome.

A few days before the holiday, after a fresh snow fall, they had a winter picnic. The morning was bright and still, the frost sparkling in the air, the snow-sprinkled evergreens gleaming in the sun, and the trunks of the paper birches, "the white ladies of the wood," standing out against the deep green as if coated with silver. The woods looked like the pictures Jack Frost paints on the window panes. The snow was not deep, and the going was good up the frozen harbor among the islands. As there were only two pairs of snowshoes and the long skis, Jack rode on the toboggan.

On a bit of shelving, rocky shore, open enough so that there was no danger of burning the trees, the boys lighted two fires, a little one to cook over and a larger one to keep them warm. They had

brought ham and potatoes to fry, bread and a jar of jam. The snow-strewn rocks were too cold to sit on, so the picnickers had to stand and squat around the fire, but it kept them warm enough.

After lunch, they drowned out their fires, and went into the woods to select a Christmas tree. Near their picnic place was a grove of snow-decked spruces of all sizes, from tall, old trees to tiny ones that did not reach to Jack's waist, all as regular in their cone-like shapes as toy trees. Not wishing to disturb this handsome grove, the tree hunters penetrated farther back into the forest, until, in a clump of small evergreens where it would not be missed, they found a pretty, little spruce just the right height. As has been said before, Ralph and Lawrence did not like to cut live, sound trees, but they knew Jack would be disappointed if he did not have his Christmas tree.

After the spruce was felled, they gathered some balsam, spruce and cedar branches, with cones still clinging to them, and Ralph climbed a tree to get some bunches of mountain ash berries, dried but still red. Going deeper into the woods, where there was more soil and leaf mould, the boys dug down under the snow for ground pine, and pulled up a quantity of both kinds, the running pine that comes up in single shoots from runners that trail along under the leaves, and the kind that grows in little bunches from long roots going straight down. Jack called

the little clumps "fairies' Christmas trees." In the meantime, Meg gathered the feathery branches of American yew, or ground hemlock, with their waxy, red berries, that look like little candle holders.

While they were in the woods they noticed in the snow many tracks of birds and squirrels. Mottled black and white, downy woodpeckers hammered on the tree trunks, and inquisitive, blue-gray nuthatches, with triangular, black patches on their heads, and plaintive, squeaking chirps, ran head first down the bark to see what the intruders were doing, while trim, black-capped chickadees uttered their deep-chested "chick-a-dee-dees" and flew close to pick up the crumbs Meg scattered for them. Saucy squirrels chattered and scolded, and once Ralph startled a big hare in his white, winter coat. The hare leaped across an open space to the shelter of a bush, where he paused motionless, his long ears erect and and his sensitive nose quivering. The young folk certainly did not find it lonely there in the winter woods among all those shy, wild things.

Tree, branches and ground pine were carried back to the toboggan, and the snowshoes, which the picnickers had not used in the thick woods, resumed for the homeward trip. Dusk had come before they reached the cabin.

The day before Christmas the tree was set up, and trimmed with cones, red mountain ash berries, bluish juniper berries, and a few ornaments Mar-

garet and Jack had made from tinfoil, birchbark and bits of colored paper. The ground pine was made into wreaths, which, with the evergreen branches, were used to trim the room. When the decorations were finished, the four agreed that the cabin looked very "Christmasy."

Several winter birds frequented the little island, and Jack proposed that they be given a Christmas dinner too. So Ralph made a little shelf with a roof, and fastened it to the trunk of a birch tree beyond one of the living-room windows. He scattered some crumbs on the shelf, and late in the afternoon Jack noticed a nuthatch running down the tree. He seemed afraid of the shelf at first, but, after advancing towards it and retreating, and flying off and coming back again a number of times, he finally made up his mind to investigate it cautiously.

"It's a pity we haven't any suet for him," Ralph said. "He doesn't seem to care much for crumbs."

"We might put out some pork or bacon," replied Margaret, "but I don't know whether salt is good for birds. I'll try soaking it out of a piece of pork."

Christmas eve the four made candy, chocolate fudge and molasses taffy, and after it was cold, they filled a little birch basket for each one. When everything was ready for the Christmas celebration, and they were sitting around the fire, the feeling of loneliness came back to them.

"Just think of the miles of snow and ice between

us and the nearest people who are celebrating Christmas eve to-night," said Larry suddenly. "I don't think I've quite realized it before."

Margaret shivered a little, and Ralph hastened to say, "Don't realize it now. We mustn't think about that or we'll get homesick. It won't do to begin feeling that way now, with three or four months of loneliness ahead of us."

No one said anything for a few minutes. Then Meg, who had been staring steadily into the fire, began to sing. It was the old Christmas carol, "Silent night, holy night." Jack and Ralph joined in, though the latter's voice was rather cracked and unreliable. Then they sang other carols, old ones like "God rest you, merry gentlemen," and "Good King Wenceslas," and the more modern "Hark the herald angels sing," and "O little town of Bethlehem." It had always been a Christmas custom with the Elliots to sing carols, so they knew the words. Lawrence had not been brought up in a real home and he did not know them. He joined in though, humming the tunes.

As they finished the last carol, Meg happened to glance towards a window. She started in her chair. Was that a man looking in? A glimpse only, and he was gone. With an effort of will, she smothered the cry that rose to her lips. Perhaps she had been mistaken, but she had thought she saw a face,

a man's face with shaggy hair and snow flecked beard. Only for an instant had it appeared. Surely it must have been a creation of imagination.

Before going to bed, Ralph went for an armful of wood. He was gone for some time. "It's a real Christmas eve all right, snowing hard," he said, as he dropped his load into the box by the fireplace.

He did not mention that, as he had gone out of the door, he had seen something slip around the corner of the shed, a dim shape in the falling snow, with the appearance of a man or a large beast walking on its hind legs. He ran after it, but did not get another glimpse. There were tracks in the soft, loose snow. He hastened back to the kitchen, lighted the lantern, and went to examine the prints. The fast falling flakes had blurred them so he could not tell whether they had been made by man or beast. They led him to the shore, but on the ice, where the wind was drifting the snow, he lost them. It was not until the next morning that he told Larry what he had seen.

Ralph was up before daylight to look after the fires. Snow was still coming down, big, soft flakes that made white mounds out of the evergreens, their limbs drooping under the load. Margaret said, when she looked out, that the views from the windows were their Christmas cards, and beautiful ones too. After breakfast was over and the morn-

ing work done, Jack asked if they were not going to have their presents, but Meg said no.

"We must make our Christmas last through the day. Dinner will be at one and the tree afterwards. You boys come and sit down by the fire. We needn't be heathen if we are alone in the woods."

When they had gathered around the fire, she took down from one of the shelves a little Bible, and read the real story of Christmas. Probably none of them had ever listened so attentively or reverently in church as they did in that little cabin on the lonely island. Then they sang carols again.

Margaret had done her best to have a good dinner. There was no turkey or mince pie of course, but there were baked ham and boiled onions, potatoes and canned peas, raspberry jam to spread on their bread, and, as a climax to the feast, a spiced cake made with an extra amount of baking powder, instead of eggs, and plenty of raisins and currants. The wild things had their Christmas feast too, for Meg had soaked the salt out of a piece of pork and had hung it over the feeding shelf, and Jack had put out some bits of bread and vegetables by the back door, where he was in the habit of feeding the two hares that lived on the little island.

The young folk had put their wits to work to devise gifts for each other. For several nights, after Jack had gone to bed, Ralph had worked on a pair

of snowshoes for him, making the frames of slender strips of wood steamed and bent to the proper shape, and lacing them with strong fishline. Sinew would have been better for the purpose, but he oiled and stretched the cord to make it taut and strong. Margaret had already supplied the boys with mittens, but had been knitting early and late to get a pair of stockings done for each for Christmas. With Meg's help, Jack had made, for the older boys, a checker board of a thin, wooden box cover, blackening the alternate squares with ink and cutting the men out of bits of wood. For his sister he had made a birch bark box. To Ralph, Lawrence gave his handsome pocket knife, that the former had often admired, to Meg a basket full of balsam tips for a pillow, and for Jack he had whittled a set of jackstraws out of slivers of wood. For Margaret, Ralph had succeeded in making a rather clumsy birch basket. It might do to put her knitting in, he said. He had sought through the woods for a straight, slender, but strong pole, which he had barked and oiled, to make a staff for Larry to use when skiing. All four enjoyed their simple presents as much as they had ever enjoyed more elaborate ones.

Snow fell steadily all day, and that made the cabin seem cozier than ever. In the evening the young folk played some hard fought games of checkers and jackstraws, and ate candy between

moves. On the whole this Christmas alone on the island was by no means an unhappy one. It was fortunate for the castaways that they could not foresee the disaster soon to come upon them and the hardships that were to follow.

XVII

BURNED OUT

THE weather turned very cold after Christmas. It was difficult to keep the cabin warm, and the boys grew rather careless about the fireplace, heaping up the wood and letting the flames roar up the chimney, in their efforts to heat the whole room, and not merely a little space in front of the fire. Yet the day before the disaster was unusually mild, they did not have a very big fire in the evening, and Ralph was sure he had covered it carefully.

Waking during the night, he heard the wind whistling around the house and the trees creaking and swaying. "I guess we're in for another storm," he thought, and went to sleep again.

The next thing he knew Larry was shaking him. At first Ralph could not understand what his friend wanted. Then suddenly the latter's words penetrated the boy's sleepy head.

"The chimney's on fire!"

Tumbling out of bed, Ralph seized his clothes. He could hear another sound now besides the whist-

ling of the wind, a snapping, cracking noise, and he could smell smoke.

Jack was awake, and Ralph gave him his orders. "The chimney's on fire. Get dressed and do as Meg tells you."

Waiting only long enough to call Margaret, he ran out, followed by Lawrence. Smoke, sparks and flames were pouring out of the chimney. The two boys put up the ladder, and Ralph climbed to the roof. Larry was following when Ralph stopped him.

"Go in and get the stuff out," he called back. "Clothes first. Send Jack with the shovel."

Larry made no answer, but obeyed promptly. Without thinking what he was doing, he ran to the back door, but as he opened it and went in, he realized that it was strange that door should be unfastened. Ralph must have forgotten to lock it when he brought in wood before going to bed.

The roof was smoking in several places and blazing in one. Ralph gathered up snow in his hands and threw it on the burning spots. In a few moments Jack brought him the shovel. The sparks were flying so, he could not get near enough to put much snow down the chimney, but he did his best. When he had scraped up what there was on the roof, he jumped down into a snow bank, and began throwing up shovelfuls from below. Fortunately the cabin was a low one, and the snow was deep,

hard packed around the house, and crusted over so it bore him up.

After he had thrown a quantity of snow on the roof, he scrambled up again from the top of a drift, and began to shovel the snow on the burning places. At first he seemed to be holding his own and keeping the fire from spreading, but he soon realized that it was gaining on him. He worked on though, encouraged by the fact that snow was falling fine and wet, almost like rain. There was little chance of saving the roof however. One place might fall at any moment.

Margaret, Larry and Jack were carrying things out. Ralph called down to Meg as she came out with a load. "Get things out as fast as you can. The roof's going to fall in."

She ran back into the house. A few minutes later a piece of the roof next to the chimney fell through, scattering sparks in every direction, even on Ralph, and causing him to almost tumble off. He climbed down and made for the door, to meet Larry coming out.

"We can't save the place. All we can do is to get out everything we can."

The clothes, the bedding and the vegetables, that were stored in Margaret's bedroom, had been thrown out of the windows. Part of the other food supplies had been saved. Luckily the wind had shifted or gone down, only an occasional gust fanning the

flames, and it was snowing hard, no longer fine and rain-like, but big, soft, wet flakes, that kept the fire partly in check. But the smoke was so bad that the boys could not do more than dash in, seize an armful, and dash out again as quickly as possible. One more trip was all they made, for just as Lawrence was coming out, a great piece of the living room ceiling fell.

Most of the things that the snow would hurt were thrown under the protecting roof of the woodshed, which was at some distance from the house, and was too piled with snow to be affected by flying sparks. The wet snow saved the trees also. Had they caught fire, the flames would have swept the little island from end to end. But only one, a small birch, was burned.

Dawn had come while the fire fighters were working. The cabin would have been burned to the ground long before daylight, had it not been for the thick, wet snow. Now the boys determined to help the snow save as much of the building as possible.

Ralph ran down to the water hole, and, finding it still open, went to work, using two pails. The others formed a line. Ralph dipped up a pailful and swung it to Meg, who passed it to Jack. He, in turn, carried it to Larry, and Larry threw it on the fire, and passed back the empty pail. Between times he threw snow against the house. Of course all this labor would have been of no avail without

the snowstorm, but their efforts did seem to help a little. At any rate, the flames died down under the wet blanket, and finally the remains of the cabin merely smoked and smoldered.

Not till then did the young folk take stock of what was left to them. Up to that moment they had not had time to think. It was a doleful, little group that gazed on the blackened, smoking ruins of their home. The roof was completely burned off, and only part of the wall was standing.

"What in the world are we going to do?" said Margaret. It was the first discouraged word any one had spoken.

Ralph shook his head. "There's one thing certain. We can't ever fix up the place. We've only a few boards and a handful of nails. Even if we tear down the woodshed, we have no shingles."

"Then we haven't any home!" The tears stood in little Jack's eyes.

"We'll find another home. But the first thing to do is to eat."

They dug out some provisions from the pile of things in the woodshed, and ate a cold breakfast. While they were eating they considered the situation.

"There's only one thing to do," said Ralph. "We've got to make ourselves at home in some other house. We're using the Thorsens' supplies. I suppose we may as well use their cabin too."

"It isn't nearly as good as this was," Lawrence

replied. "It's older and not so well built. It would be even harder to heat. There is only the cooking stove and no fireplace."

"The houses on the summer resort island are just intended for summer," Ralph replied. "The frame ones would be awfully cold, and the log ones are fastened up tight. We should have to break in."

"Oh, we'd hate to do that!" cried Margaret. "I do wish," she added thoughtfully, "that the old lighthouse was a little nearer."

"So do I. It would be just the place for us, and the back door is unlocked."

"It surely would be the warmest house we could find," agreed Larry. "Those thick, stone walls can't let the wind through, and we know the stove and fireplace and chimneys are all right. But it's too far away. It must be at least eight miles."

"There wouldn't be much danger of burning it down though. Those buildings at the fishing camp would burn like tinder."

"You're right. A fire would sweep them away in no time, and there aren't any chimneys, just a stove pipe through the roof. It's easy to set a house on fire with an overheated pipe."

"A fire wouldn't stop with the buildings," Ralph added. "The place is on the main island, you know, and if the trees caught, it would mean a forest fire."

"Oh," cried Margaret, "we mustn't stay there. I should be afraid of fire every minute."

"Well," suggested Larry, "shall we try to break into some other cabin then?"

"I doubt if we could do it. We might break a window and crawl in, but how could we patch up the glass again? Anyway, unless one of the doors happened to be fastened on the inside, breaking a window wouldn't do any good. We couldn't keep on going in and out that way."

"Do you suppose" Larry said thoughtfully, "that we *could* make the trip to the old light?"

"It's sure the best place for us," Ralph answered. "We can get in without smashing anything. It's warmly built. As Meg says, it wouldn't burn down easily. If one of those summer resort houses should catch fire, everything on that island might go, houses and trees. It frightens a fellow to think of it, especially when you realize how easily this conflagration started. I covered the fire well last night. I don't see how the wind could have made it blaze up enough for the chimney to catch."

"Maybe you covered the fire all right, but you left the back door unbolted," Lawrence replied.

"Did I?" Ralph looked startled. "But that couldn't have made any difference with the fire." He was silent for a moment. Then he said suddenly, "Well, what are we going to do? We've got to make up our minds."

"The lighthouse is such a long way to take our things," said Margaret doubtfully.

"It won't be so bad with our snowshoes and toboggan. We must have gone nearly as far when we went up to the head of the harbor and back that day before Christmas. We could take the necessary things first. Then you and I, Larry, could come back for the rest. It would be hard work of course, but I believe it's worth the trouble, don't you?"

"Yes, I believe it is," Lawrence replied slowly. He was thinking of the warmth and security of those thick walls.

The snow had ceased falling, but the air was growing colder. The homeless ones must find a place of shelter very soon. After a little more debate, they decided that, in spite of the distance, the lighthouse would be the best place for them. They thought that, when spring came, they would stand a better chance there of hailing a boat and being taken off strengthened their decision.

XVIII

THROUGH THE SNOW TO THE OLD LIGHTHOUSE

FORTUNATELY the bulk of the food supplies had been left in Knut Thorsen's house, or the loss would have been far more serious. It was afternoon when everything was ready for a start. The fire seemed to be entirely out, so Lawrence and Ralph were not afraid to leave it. They had loaded the toboggan, and, in addition, had made up packs as big and heavy as they thought they could carry. At first Larry went ahead to break the trail, Ralph following with the toboggan, but they changed places frequently.

Running out from the point, was a ridge of rough, broken, snow covered ice, which had been piled up by the wind when the freezing process was going on. Getting the toboggan over was troublesome. If the load had not been tied on securely, it would certainly have been lost off more than once.

The travelers had gone a short distance beyond the ice ridge, when Jack noticed a head protruding from a hole in the rocks. He saw it distinctly, a man's head. A battered, old hat drawn low and

a shaggy, black beard concealed the face. The boy seized Margaret by the arm.

"There's a man up there," he exclaimed.

She turned, startled. "Where?" she cried.

"His head was sticking up right there." Jack pointed to the place. "He ducked down quick."

"You must be mistaken, Jack. It was a rock you saw." But Meg did not believe what she was saying. She spoke to Lawrence, who was a little way ahead with the toboggan.

"Larry, Jack thinks he saw a man up there on the shore."

Larry turned quickly. "Where?" he asked. "What was he like?"

"He had an old hat and a big beard. I just saw his head over the rocks. He was watching us. Then he ducked."

"You don't suppose he really saw some one, do you?" Margaret's face and voice betrayed her uneasiness.

Lawrence tried to reassure her. "He saw a stump or a rock or a piece of driftwood. Where could a man come from around here? And why should he hide from us? Just to make you more comfortable though, Ralph and I will go see."

He called Ralph, and the two went to investigate. They were obliged to take off their snowshoes before they could climb up over the partly bare rocks.

They hurried to the spot Jack had indicated. There, in a deep hole, some large body had been wallowing in the snow. They could see where it had crouched and where it had made its way through a narrow cleft opening from the hole. They followed the cleft, and found the place where, under cover of a spruce growing at the edge, the man had climbed out. A man it certainly was, for, under the spruce and beyond it, the prints were plain. The boys looked at each other. Should they follow the tracks?

"He's got the start of us by several minutes," said Ralph. "It might take some time to come up with him, though he can't cover his tracks very well with all this soft snow."

"It's as much as ever that we can reach the lighthouse by dark," Larry replied. "I should like to track that fellow all right, but I don't believe we can afford the time. Besides, we should have to leave Meg and Jack down there waiting for us."

"Or else take them back to the fishing camp. If we're going to get to the lighthouse to-night, I guess we'll have to let him go for the present, but the next time we get a trace of him we'll track him down. We'd better hurry back or they'll think something is up. Don't say anything about this trail."

"There's no one there," Ralph assured Margaret and Jack.

"But I saw him," insisted Jack.

"If you did, he's vanished. We looked all around."

"Didn't he leave any tracks?"

The older boys did not appear to hear that question. Lawrence had gone on ahead, and Ralph had seized the toboggan rope and was hastening after him.

"Never mind, Jack," said Margaret. "You must have been mistaken."

The little fellow made no reply. "They think they can fool me," he thought. "They did find something. There's a bad man around here. Maybe it's an Indian. I don't think Indians have beards though. Anyway they won't tell because they think we'll be scared." He gave a little grunt. "They must think I'm a baby," he said to himself resentfully.

Margaret too was convinced that the lads were keeping something back. Probably they did not want Jack to be frightened, she thought. Perhaps they would tell her later. "If they do, I'll tell them about that face at the window," she resolved, "but if they treat me like a child and try to make me think there isn't any one spying on us, I'll just keep still until I can prove to them that I knew about him all the time. There's some reason why they think he's something to be afraid of. I can't see why any one should want to hurt us though."

As the refugees went on along the rocky shore, they encountered at intervals other patches of rough, heaped up ice. Although none was as bad as the first one, all were bothersome enough, and took time and labor to cross.

The weight of packs and toboggan seemed to grow heavier all the time. Breaking a trail through the deep snow was hard work, and the four plodded on, heads down, seldom speaking, for talking seemed an unnecessary waste of energy. Up to that time excitement had kept them from realizing how hard they had worked since before dawn. They had not felt tired when they left the little island, but now weariness came over them all of a sudden. Margaret and Jack pluckily made no complaint, but they had not gone more than two miles of the eight or nine, when the little fellow began, in spite of all his efforts, to lag behind. He said nothing, but he looked so done up that the others knew he never could make it on foot.

"See here, Jack," Ralph said, "we're going to give you a ride. Climb on top of the sled and take off your snowshoes."

He objected at first, and Ralph let him try it a while longer. But when he saw that the boy could scarcely get ahead, and that the tears were standing in his eyes from sheer exhaustion, the older brother insisted. Jack must have something warm to wrap up in though. They were exposed to the

wind in the outer harbor, and he was so tired he might easily chill through. The comforts and blankets were underneath the one cot that had been saved, and to get them out the boys had to untie the load. That was not easy to do, for the ropes were frozen stiff. Ralph had to take off his mittens to get the knots loose, and he nearly froze his fingers. It was growing colder rapidly. Finally, however, they had Jack settled with a comfort to sit on, and a heavy blanket wrapped around him.

By the time the load was lashed fast again, they were all chilly, and had to quicken their pace to warm up. For a while they went ahead at a fairly good rate, Margaret keeping up well with Larry and Ralph. But the sled was heavier than ever with Jack's added weight, and they soon slowed down again.

Never before had miles seemed so long. There were no more rough ice ridges, but the snow was not perfectly level by any means. Drifts had to be surmounted frequently. Moreover the new fall was soft, and even the broad snowshoes sank into it. Margaret began to lag, and Jack kept going to sleep and had to be aroused for fear he would fall off the toboggan or freeze some part of him. Several times Ralph made him get off, put on his snowshoes, and go a little way on foot to warm himself.

Dusk came, and with the waning of the light the cold increased. The boys' backs and shoulders

ached with their packs, their ankles and legs were lame from the effort of snowshoeing, the sled pulled as if it were loaded with lead, and they were all so tired they wanted to lie down in the snow and stay there. Each wondered how long he could hold out, and how the others stood it. But they all kept moving somehow.

It was dark before they reached the lighthouse. Very bleak and cold and inhospitable it looked with the snow drifted about it. Their hearts sank when they thought how much more there was to do before they could be warm and comfortable. The boys took the toboggan to the back door and unfastened their packs. As they had forgotten to bring the shovel, they had to dig and scoop the snow away from the door with their hands. Then they met a new difficulty. The door was frozen down. For a while it looked as if they had come all that way only to be denied entrance to their refuge at last. They managed to open the door finally though, but, before they could make a fire, the older lads had to go over to the fishermen's camp for wood. They knew there was a small pile of cut sticks there.

When Larry and Ralph returned to the lighthouse, they found Meg and Jack still outside. They could do nothing until the ropes on the sled were unfastened and the lantern pulled out from under the pile of bedding. As soon as they had a light, Law-

rence set to work to kindle a fire, while the rest carried in the things.

One of Jack's feet was so numb he could only stumble. When it began to warm up, he cried with pain, plucky little fellow though he was. Margaret whipped off his shoe and heavy stocking.

"I believe your foot's frosted," she said. "Bring me some snow, won't you please, Larry?"

With the snow she rubbed Jack's foot until the color came back. Larry had a frosted thumb too, but did not say much about it till afterward. Meg and Ralph had escaped frost bite.

Weary though they were, there was no chance to rest yet. As soon as possible Meg set about getting supper. Lawrence, knowing how nearly dead she must be, suggested that they have a cold lunch, but she said no, they must have a good, warm meal. So she made pancakes and fried a great pile of bacon. The very smell made the boys feel like starved wolves.

By the time supper was ready, the kitchen was comfortably warm. Margaret and the boys were so tired that they lingered over the meal as long as they could, but they had to rouse themselves at last. There was still work to be done before they could sleep. Lawrence and Ralph had to bring another supply of wood, and there were the beds to make ready. It was useless to try to make any of the other rooms habitable that night, and Meg thought

the mattress on the iron bedstead would be too cold and damp to use. So they set up the cot for her there in the kitchen, and the boys spread their beds on the floor.

Ralph expected to sleep like a log, but he did not, at least not at first. He had been too tired to cut evergreen branches for his bed, and the floor felt hard and cold even through a thick comfort. Moreover, he ached so he could not lie still. It was two or three hours before he dropped to sleep.

XIX

TRACKS IN THE SNOW

RALPH woke at dawn, shivering with cold in spite of his covers. Lawrence and Jack were still sleeping. Getting out of bed to light the fire never was a pleasant task, but that morning Ralph hated it worse than ever. The first move he made hurt, and it was all he could do to get out of his blankets and on to his feet. He was lame all over from the hard work of yesterday. Every muscle was stiff and sore, and he felt anything but cheerful as he looked around the little room, cluttered and disorderly, cold and cheerless in the faint, morning light.

The fire making disturbed Larry. He moved sleepily, groaned, opened his eyes, stared stupidly about him a moment, started to sit up, and dropped back with an exclamation. "I feel as if I had been pounded all over," he said. He made another effort. "I was mistaken," he muttered. "I haven't been pounded. I've been stretched on the rack, the way they used to torture people."

"So have I," Ralph retorted grimly, "but I had to get up just the same."

Their voices aroused Margaret and Jack, but Ralph ordered them both to lie still until the room was warmer. He and Larry had to go for more wood, and by the time they returned the others were up. They both complained of lameness and muscle soreness, and Jack's frosted foot was so sore he could not get his shoe on. A warm breakfast helped them all a little, but they were a rather disconsolate quartet. Going to the other harbor for a load that day was out of the question, but the labor of digging some drift logs out of the snow, and a thorough rubbing that Ralph and Lawrence gave each other, helped to take the soreness out of their backs and limbs.

It was bright the next morning and very cold, when the two boys started on their long trip back to Smith Harbor. They had made a fortunate find at the fishing station, a large sled with iron shod runners, and, in spite of sore muscles, they went at good speed, snowshoes and empty sleds slipping easily over their trail of two days before. The one real drawback was the cold wind. Ralph suggested that they try going across the point instead of around it, cutting off a considerable distance and avoiding the worst ice ridge. So, when they reached the spot where a short trail led from the rocky shore to the fishing camp, they clambered over the rocks, getting the sleds up with difficulty.

The lads had decided to trace the mysterious man. Not knowing what sort of a creature he

might turn out to be, they took with them a small rifle they had found in Knut Thorsen's cabin. Leaving the sleds locked in the fisherman's house, they went back to the hole in the rocks and followed the footprints. From the spruce, where the man had climbed out of the rift, the tracks led through the woods to the shore opposite the little island and across to the ruins of the cabin.

There the boys paused to examine the remains. The kitchen had suffered less than any other part of the house, and the stove was unharmed. There were also a few cooking utensils and other things left unhurt. Some cans had burst with heat or freezing, and the contents had been cleaned out by man or animal. None of the things saved from the fire had been left on the little island. Ralph and Larry had been careful to transport to the fishing camp everything they could not take on their first trip to the lighthouse. It was singular, however, that they found no half burned, scorched or water-soaked provisions. Evidently anything of the kind that might have survived the flames had been carried away.

Many trails led back and forth from the burned house. In addition to human footprints, there were the tiny, claw tracks of birds, the neat, paired prints of squirrels and the larger marks of hares. One trail had been made by a larger beast, for the marks were like big cat tracks. The human tracks led

to the shore, and formed three distinct trails across the ice in different directions.

The boys were at a loss which to follow, but they finally selected one that led them across to an island, then to the shore, and into the woods to a clump of small balsams. The man had apparently forced his way into the center of the clump, for the branches were broken and bent. From the balsams the trail was more perplexing to follow. The forest was thick, under the trees there was much less snow and many patches of ground were bare. With some difficulty the boys trailed the man to the little shanty they had found on their first day on the island. Around the shack was a confusion of tracks. The door stood open and the room was in greater disorder than before. The man had been there beyond doubt, but he was not there then, nor was there any sign of the food he had taken from the ruins of the cabin, if indeed he *had* taken it.

"Well," said Larry, looking at his watch, "we can't follow him much farther to-day. It's one o'clock."

Ralph was examining a track leading from behind the shack. "Let's go a little way along here," he said. "I hate to give up."

The track led them into the woods a little way, circled about and came back to the shanty. They could not discover another trail leading away from the place.

“He’s tricked us somewhere,” said Ralph, “left the track, climbed a tree and come down on the other side perhaps. We haven’t time to hunt for him any more to-day. I don’t believe we can make the lighthouse before dark now.”

Compelled to give up the search, the boys hastened back to the fishing camp, ate their lunch, and loaded the toboggan and sled, going over to the burned house for the stove. They could not take the loaded sleds down the rocks, so had to go over the worst of the ice ridges, but they had brought axes and could chop out a path.

The journey, with the two sleds, was a hard one. By the time they reached the lighthouse, they had traveled more than twice as far as on the previous trip and were almost exhausted. They were too tired even to appreciate the wonderful *aurora borealis* with which the northern and western sky was flaming. But their welcome was a cheerful one, with a warm room and a good meal.

In spite of their weariness, the lads set up the stove in the room where they had first found the bedstead, and made a fire to see if the chimney was all right. The stovepipe they had brought was not quite long enough, as the room was somewhat higher than the cabin kitchen, but they fortunately found an extra length, rusty but without holes, in a closet under the tower stairs. While poking around among odds and ends in that closet, Ralph made an-

other find, a great round lantern with a reflector. It was made to burn kerosene, and probably had been used as the headlight of a boat, a sailing vessel perhaps. They examined the old lantern with curiosity, but never thought of its having any practical value.

"I wonder if these cans of milk are frozen," Margaret remarked, as she was putting away the supplies.

"I don't suppose it would hurt milk to freeze, but it might burst the cans," suggested Larry.

"I'll put them in cold water for a while. That will draw out the frost gradually, if they are frozen, and it won't hurt them if they're not."

The next day was Sunday, and the boys were all glad of an excuse to rest. Monday had to be devoted to getting a supply of wood. Wood cutting was always hard work. Where they made their first cuttings they could not get the sled in among the trees, and, after felling a tree, had to cut it up into lengths and carry or drag them out. In the afternoon Meg insisted on going with the boys to pick up branches. Jack's foot was too sore to allow him to accompany them, but the others kept at the job, and by night they were almost as tired as if they had been to the other harbor. They had the satisfaction of seeing a good pile of wood and branches behind their dwelling though.

In spite of that hard day's work, they felt they

must make a trip to Smith Harbor the next day. At any time a severe storm might cut them off from the rest of their supplies. A new misfortune awaited them at the fishing station. Holes had been gnawed in some sacks of dried beans and peas, and a quantity of them carried away. This was obviously the work of squirrels or rats. A small hole in one corner of the floor showed how the rodents had entered the store-room.

"It's lucky we came to-day," said Larry, "or they might have carried away all of those beans." As it was the loss was serious enough.

A snow fall the night before had blotted out the old tracks of the sneaking man, and there were no new ones. For the time being there was no way of trailing him.

In all their lives the two boys had never worked so hard as during those days. Their backs, legs and feet were lame, their hands and wrists chapped, cracked and frost bitten, their faces rough and sore from the biting winds. But it was of no use to grumble. They must keep fed and warm, and they had no one to depend on but themselves. They tried to stick to their work without complaining, though they could not help being a bit discouraged now and then. Little Jack hardly realized the worst of things. He helped Meg, and after his foot was well, went with the others for wood. But Margaret realized. She would not let Larry and Ralph

help with the house work, not even with the washing, because, she said, they were getting the worst of the work anyway.

However, they had some compensations. The old stone house, warmly built and cemented over on the outside, was, in spite of the winds that whistled around it, considerably warmer than the log cabin. There were six rooms on the lower floor, but they used only three. The room where they had set up the stove was the living room. In one corner they placed Margaret's bed and a box for a dresser. The room with the fireplace the boys used for a bedroom. Jack had the cot, and the older boys built rough bunks which they filled with balsam and cedar branches. They were careful this time to use only small fans, that could be stripped off easily, and to lay them smoothly, one layer thatched on top of another, with the butt ends thrust underneath. After considerable experimenting they produced springy, comfortable beds. In that room they kept a little fire during the day, putting on extra fuel morning and evening. A fire in their bedroom seemed like a luxury. The front door was locked and, as they had no key, they went in and out through the kitchen. The rooms in the upper story were of no use to them.

XX

LOST IN A BLIZZARD

THE next time Lawrence and Ralph started on the long trip to Smith Harbor, the morning was anything but a pleasant one.. It was cloudy, with a raw, penetrating, east wind.

"It will snow before we get back or I miss my guess," said Ralph, as he led off over the well packed trail.

"I hope you've missed it then," Larry replied, "and the snow will hold off until to-morrow."

Before they were half way down the harbor, however, snow began to fall, and, as they went on, it came down harder and harder.

An unpleasant surprise awaited them at the fisherman's cabin. The padlock on the back door had been smashed. A big stone, partly buried in the snow, showed how the mischief had been done. In the store-room everything was in confusion. Sacks and boxes had been opened, and the contents scattered about on the floor.

"Well," cried Ralph, in blazing wrath, "that fellow is a mean beast. He's carried off whatever

he could, and tried to spoil everything else. What grudge has he against us anyway? "

The two lads set to work to salvage as much as possible, and then they made a curious discovery. Of the supplies that had been left in the store-room, hams, bacon, dried fruit and most of the sugar had been carried off, but flour, meal and other things had been emptied out and strewn all over the floor. Such behavior on the part of the thief puzzled the boys.

"It looks," said Larry, "as if he had carried off everything he could possibly eat without cooking it and nothing that isn't eatable until it is cooked. He has acted more like a beast than a man. If it wasn't for that smashed lock and those footprints, I should think a bear, not a man, had been rummaging here."

"Do you suppose he's a wild man, some half human sort of a creature?" asked Ralph.

"He behaves that way. Perhaps though he has a supply of flour, and only wants meat and fruit and sugar."

"He must be mean all through then to try to destroy what he doesn't need and keep us from using it."

"He's probably angry because we locked him out," Larry suggested.

"Then why didn't he come to us like an honest man and make us share with him? He seems to be afraid of us and yet have a grudge against us."

The boys saved all of the remaining food they could, but not much of the flour, that had been emptied out on the dirty floor, was fit for use.

Everything they particularly wanted went on the sleds that time, and they did not have to burden themselves with packs. When they left the fishing camp, the falling snow was so thick that they could scarcely see across to the summer resort island. They went along without much difficulty until they reached the point. There the wind struck them, driving the snow now in their faces, now against their backs. They had chopped a fairly good track across the patches of rough ice, but that day, in the blinding, wind-driven snow, they failed to find their trail. Probably it had drifted full. Across the first ridge they took the sleds one at a time. The snow, which had become dry and fine, as the weather grew steadily colder, drifted here and there with the veering wind, and concealed hummocks and knobs. Four times the toboggan was overturned before the boys got it over. They had been in too much of a hurry loading it, and the first time it upset, some of the things fell off. Then the lads had to reload and lash them on more firmly. Doing this was especially troublesome in the storm, and some little things were lost and never found again.

After the boys had hauled the toboggan over, they scrambled back for the sled. Confused by the

driving snow, they could not find it at first. Finally, however, Ralph fell over it. It was almost hidden, and he had taken it for a mere drift. They dug it out, and started across with it, but the storm was so bewildering that they crossed the ridge at an angle, and came down in another place. Then they were obliged to hunt for the toboggan, which they found partly buried in the snow.

Profiting by that experience, they took the two sleds together over the other rough places, Lawrence going first with the smaller one, and Ralph following with the larger. It was hard work, and again they had several upsets.

The storm was growing worse all the time. The snow whirled about them in clouds, the wind veering and driving it from every direction. Fine, dry and icy, it stung their faces and blinded them, while the wind took away their breaths. If the snow had been wet it would not have been so bad, but this dry stuff drifted like sand, worse than sand indeed. Their snowshoes and sleds sank down into the drifts instead of riding on top of them.

Thicker and thicker came the snow, harder and harder blew the wind, until sometimes they could scarcely stand against it. The outlying islands, the trees of the shore line, were blotted out entirely. The boys could no longer be sure of their direction. Their landmarks all lost, the snow swirling about

them, they had nothing for a guide, not even the wind. The shifting, whirling gale seemed to come from every direction.

Heads down, faces stinging, hands stiff with cold, the bitter wind penetrating their clothes, they plodded on, tugging at the sleds. Where they were going they could not tell, but they had to keep on, had to get somewhere. Both of them knew that if they stopped there in the snow, they would probably freeze. They were lost in a white, whirling world, but they realized that they must go on.

On and on they struggled, fighting their way, the sleds growing ever heavier to pull through the drifting snow. At last there came a time when the lads could drag them no longer. Ralph had the toboggan. Much as he hated to give up, he knew he could not go on that way.

"Larry," he gasped. His voice sounded hoarse and unnatural. He lacked the power to shout. The two had kept close together, for fear of losing one another, and Larry heard him and grunted in reply.

"We've got to leave the sleds, if we're going to save ourselves," Ralph panted.

"But we'll never find them," Larry objected weakly.

"It can't be helped. We'll mark the place."

In the last few minutes Ralph had formed a plan. On top of the toboggan was a long pole he had

picked up just before starting, thinking it might prove useful for something. He would set that up in the snow to mark the place where the sleds were left. It took the boys' stiffened fingers some time to unfasten the pole and plant it firmly between the sleds.

That done, they started on, where they did not know, out towards the open lake perhaps, around in a circle very likely. Of only one thing were they sure, they must keep going at all hazards. But that was not easy to do. Ralph felt himself growing numb and stupid. A deadly weariness crept over him. There was just one thing he wanted to do, lie down in the snow and go to sleep. He could not go on. He must rest. It would be so good to lie down there and sleep. But pounding away somewhere in the corner of his numbed brain were the words, "You've got to go on. You must not stop."

Larry was even worse. "I must stop and rest," he gasped.

"Keep going," Ralph replied. "Go on or you'll freeze."

"I have to *rest*. Just a minute. Then I'll go on."

"Keep going," the other answered, as he struggled to lift the foot he had just set down in a drift.

There was no reply. Something made Ralph look back. He could just distinguish Lawrence squatted down in the snow.

"I must rest," the latter repeated dully.

That aroused Ralph. His brain woke suddenly to a realization of Larry's peril. He turned on his friend savagely.

"Get up," he cried.

Larry groaned. "I can't," he began, "in just a —"

Ralph did not wait for him to finish.

"You *will*," he shouted.

With his fist he struck Larry in the back. Then he kicked him with his snowshoe, and slapped him in the face. That made Larry angry. Ralph intended that it should. Larry struggled to his feet and turned on his companion, his fists doubled. But the latter was not going to waste time and strength fighting.

"Go on," he ordered. "Go ahead. Keep going or you'll freeze. You're going on if I have to kick you every step."

Larry stared at him for an instant, then turned and stumbled forward. Neither of them knew how long they kept on. It began to grow dark. Several times Larry stopped and acted as if he were going to lie down in the snow, and every time Ralph cuffed, struck and kicked him till he went on again. Why Lawrence did not turn on him and thrash him, Ralph did not know. Probably the older boy was too far gone. Perhaps he realized dimly that

Ralph was acting for his good. As for Ralph himself, the necessity of keeping Lawrence going had aroused him somewhat. He wanted badly enough to stop and rest. Perhaps if he had been alone he might have yielded.

Darkness came, but that did not make much difference. They could see nothing but snow anyway. A horrible feeling came over Ralph that they were going straight out into the lake. He wondered vaguely what would become of Meg and Jack. Well, they had enough to eat to last the two of them till spring. As for fuel —

Suddenly Larry fell backwards on him, and both went down. The end had come, Ralph thought. Larry was done for. He rolled out from under his friend, and scrambled to his feet, his snowshoes hindering him. Then he seized Larry by the shoulder and gave him a jerk.

"Get up," he said.

To Ralph's surprise, for he thought it was all over with Larry, the latter made the effort, and, with Ralph's help, was soon on his feet again.

"I struck something," he said. "It knocked me over. What was it?"

"Struck something?" Hope surged up in Ralph once more. He groped forward in the snow and darkness. His hands encountered something. He had thought it might be a rock or tree. But no, it

was neither. After several moments of groping about, he understood what they had run into. His heart leaped with joy. The thing was a dock!

He had lost Lawrence, however. He tried to shout, but his voice was hoarse and feeble. There was no answer. Groping about in the swirling storm, he almost fell over Larry, who had settled back in the snow. Ralph grasped him and jerked him up.

"It's a dock," he cried.

Larry simply stared at him. Ralph struck him sharply on the cheek with his mittened hand.

"Wake up," he cried huskily. "It's a dock. That means a house, shelter."

That time Larry understood. Without a word he followed Ralph, grasping him by the coat, not to lose him. The latter felt for the dock again and found it. His hand on it, he went ahead. After a little he ran into a bush. They had reached shore. But how were they going to find the house? They stumbled along, running into trees, tripping over bushes. Fear seized Ralph. Perhaps there was no house. He knew of at least two places where there were old docks but no cabins. Just then his groping hand struck something that did not feel like a tree. He ran his hand over it. It was the wall of a building!

"We've found it, Larry," he said. "Now for the door."

They failed to find that door, but they did discover a window, an unshuttered one. Ralph not only felt the glass, but there, a little sheltered from the swirling storm, he could see it. Without hesitation he smashed his fist through that glass. Then he systematically broke it out clear to the frame on every side. His thick mitten kept him from being cut.

"Crawl through, Larry," he said.

Lawrence was so nearly exhausted Ralph had to boost him. He forgot about his friend's snowshoes until the latter was part way in. Then Ralph had to pull him out again, and help him to get them off. Up he boosted him a second time, handed in the two pairs of snowshoes, and crawled through himself.

It was pitch dark in the house. Ralph pulled off his mittens and rummaged in his pockets for a match. The light showed him a small room with no furniture but a rickety table, an old chair and a rusty stove. Still holding his lighted match, he stumbled through a doorway, his feet feeling like chunks of wood, into a shed. There he was glad to discover a pile of empty boxes and an ax with a broken handle. He went back into the main room, and luckily, for he had only a few matches, found on a shelf a half-burned candle in a battered, tin candlestick.

In the meanwhile Lawrence had sunk down into the one chair. Leaving him there, Ralph took the

candle and went into the shed again. With the broken ax he split up one of the boxes, carried the pieces back to the stove, and was about to kindle a fire, when a gust of wind and snow blowing into the room reminded him of the open window. He broke up another box into larger pieces and managed to stop the hole. Then he returned to his fire making.

When he had the fire burning, he turned to Larry. The latter's head had fallen forward and he seemed to be asleep. Ralph had to shake him to arouse him enough to get him to the fire. By the time he had brushed the snow from Larry and from himself, the older boy had begun to thaw out and to feel better. They rubbed themselves, and, taking off their mocasins and stockings, put their feet close to the stove. Fortunately they were not frozen, only numbed and chilled.

After he had warmed up a little, Ralph went in search of something to eat. Not a scrap of anything could he find except a little flour in the bottom of a big, dirty-looking can. They could not eat raw flour. On the shelf where he had found the candle was an old coffee pot, and beneath it a small frying pan hanging on a nail. In the coffee pot Ralph melted some snow. Then he attempted to mix flour with the water. The result was paste. He remembered that he should have let the water cool. The next time he tried, after cooling his snow water, he succeeded in getting some sticky dough. On a piece

of board he made the dough into a thin cake. He thought he could bake it in the frying pan, but it stuck and burned. A drop of wax running down the side of the candle gave him an idea.

"I wonder if I can grease my pan with that," he thought. "It looks like tallow, not paraffine."

He greased the pan with the end of the candle, put in another dough cake and baked it on top of the stove. Lawrence had fallen asleep again, and Ralph did not wake him till the scanty meal was ready. A dough cake without yeast or baking powder or even salt is not very palatable, but it is better than no food when you are half starved.

After they had eaten, the lads looked for something to sleep on. There were no beds or cots in the house and not even a blanket or bit of bedding, nothing but an old piece of canvas, which they spread on the dirty floor near the stove. The two boys lay down on the canvas close together, pulled the rest of it over them, and went to sleep. There in the house they were sure that their heavy clothes would keep them from freezing, even if the fire went out. They did not dare to leave much fire for fear of accidents, and they were both too tired to sit up and watch it.

XXI

WOLF TRACKS

LAWRENCE woke chilled through. The room was lighted with a dull, gray light. When he moved he waked Ralph. Without a word they got stiffly to their feet, went to the unbroken window and looked out. The snow was still swirling in dense clouds, and the wind whistled around the house.

"We can't leave here yet," said Ralph. "We might as well get something to eat."

Larry kindled the fire, while Ralph stirred up another dough cake. He was concerned to see that the flour would not hold out for more than two more scanty meals. The house, they could see by daylight, was little more than a shack, with one room and a shed. It was dirty and deserted looking. Had it not been for the flour in the tin can, the boys would have concluded that the place had not been lived in for years.

"Probably it's only used occasionally for a little while by some one fishing or trapping," said Larry. "It's funny there isn't even a cot or a bunk."

The day dragged on slowly. The lads had to

use their supply of fuel carefully to make it last through, and they decided not to eat anything more till night, though one cake had been far from satisfying. It was late afternoon before the storm had lessened enough so that they could see anything from the window.

"I don't believe it's snowing so much now," Ralph said, looking out, "but it's still blowing like anything."

"Do you think we dare start out?"

"No, I don't, especially as we've no idea where we are. We can't get away from here before morning. By that time the wind may go down."

"You're right," Lawrence replied soberly. "We've been saved once from freezing to death. We won't be so foolish as to risk it again."

"Meg and Jack must be nearly crazy, but we can't help that. They've plenty to eat anyway, and the wood is piled so close to the door that they can get it easily enough. There's no danger of their starving or freezing."

The boxes were almost gone. To look for a possible woodpile, Ralph tried to go out of the one door, which opened from the shed, but the snow was so packed against it that he could not get the door open. So he crawled through the broken window. He found no sign of a woodpile, and was glad, after floundering around for a while, to crawl back.

The boys went to bed at dark, for they wanted to save the rest of the candle to grease the frying pan. When they woke, chilled and miserable with cold and hunger, they looked out on a white world. The snow had ceased to fall and the wind had gone down. There were trees close around the house, but from the window where the lads had entered they could catch a glimpse of an open plain, the harbor, of course.

Larry used the last match to light a fire, and the remains of the wood to cook the little cake. As soon as they had eaten, the two boys started out. They climbed out of the window, and had some difficulty getting into their snowshoes in the deep snow. Then they made their way through the trees towards the open.

"It's lucky this house is so close to the shore, or we might not have found it even after we ran into the dock," Ralph said, as he paused to take a look at the little frame cabin that had sheltered them. "I can't locate this place though. I never remember noticing it on any of our trips, and I don't see why."

"Just what I was thinking," Larry returned. "Whew, look there. Either the sun's rising in the west or we're completely turned around."

The sky was red with the sunrise, but in entirely the wrong direction. When they reached the open, the lads began to understand their situation. Be-

fore them stretched the harbor, but the line of woods on the other side seemed to be continuous. They stared at each other in amazement. That was the shore of the main island over there, while they were evidently on one of the chain of small islands which sheltered the harbor on the southeast. No wonder they had never noticed the shanty. In their trips back and forth they had always kept well in towards the main shore.

"We're turned around for sure," said Larry.

"Do you see what that means?" Ralph replied. "It means that when you ran into that dock we were headed for the open lake. If we had missed this island, had happened to go between two islands —"

He stopped. The possibility was too horrible.

Their surprise at their situation and their eagerness to get home drove out of their minds the remembrance of the sleds. They never once thought to look for them.

It was hard going through the dry, drifted snow. The wind had gone down entirely, the sky was clear, and the sun made the whole world sparkle. They went as fast as they could, but it was not until the tower of the lighthouse, against its background of forest, came into view, that they were able to rid themselves of the feeling that they were going in the wrong direction. As they approached they saw a figure, two figures, standing on the platform.

"They're watching for us," Ralph cried.
"They're waving to us."

He pulled off his cap, in spite of the cold, and waved back. A moment later the platform was empty.

Margaret and Jack ran out to meet them. Tears were running down Meg's cheeks, and, to tell the truth, the boys were not far from crying themselves. A hot breakfast surely tasted good. Dough cakes, scorched on the outside, more or less raw on the inside, and without salt, are poor food, though they are a good deal better than nothing.

It was not until after breakfast that the four told all their experiences. Margaret said that when the storm became bad she had been terribly worried. When darkness fell, and the boys had not come, she tried to make herself believe that they had thought it unwise to start and had stayed at the Thorsens'. But it was hard to convince herself of that. She did not go to bed that first night, and she thought daylight never would come.

The next morning she and Jack could not get the door open, the snow had drifted against it so, and the fuel in the house was almost gone. So they both climbed out of a window, made their way around to the woodpile, and succeeded in digging out some sticks. Meg said she did not fully realize how bad the storm was until she was out in it. They were

obliged to keep close to the house, so as not to lose their bearings going from the window to the wood-pile and back again.

That was the longest and hardest day she had ever put through, and the night was even worse, though by that time she was so tired out that she slept a little. She made up her mind to hope till the last minute, but hoping was difficult work. When morning came, and she saw that the storm was over, she realized that in a few hours she would know whether the others were alive or dead.

Jack climbed out of the window again, and shoveled a space in front of the door, so he could open it and carry in more wood. Then the two went up in the tower, and, looking down the harbor, saw the boys coming. The snow had drifted tremendously. It was clear over the windows on one side of the house. There was wood enough to last some time, and for a week the lads did not go far from the lighthouse. The necessary work gave them all the physical exercise they wanted for the time being.

The buried sleds were needed for hauling wood, but the boys had little hope of finding them. However, they set out one bright, cold day to hunt for some signs of them. As they approached the island where they had been snowbound, they saw, to their joy, waving above a drift, the tattered remnant of a bit of a flour sack Ralph had tied to the pole.

It took a good deal of digging to get those sleds out, for the snow had drifted deep over and around them.

The boys were puzzled to see how near the island the sleds were. It had seemed as if they had gone a long way after abandoning them. Lawrence suggested that they must have wandered about, unable to keep to anything like a straight line. They might even have been going in a circle when they ran into the dock. Certainly they were a long way out of their course. They could not repair the damage they had done when they broke into the friendly, little shack, but they could at least board up the window. They were surprised to find the door standing open.

"Surely we didn't leave it that way," said Lawrence.

"Of course we didn't," Ralph replied, "for a very good reason. We came out of the window."

"That's true," exclaimed Larry. "The snow was drifted against the door so we couldn't open it. Our friend from Smith Harbor has been here and scraped away the snow."

There had been more wind and snow during the past few days, and no tracks were visible, except those of an inquisitive squirrel that had been through the open door. The piece of old canvas and the broken-handled ax were gone.

"It's lucky he didn't find our sleds," said Ralph.

"If he's followed us over to this harbor, we'll have to keep a lookout for him."

Margaret was surprised when the sleds were unloaded. "Are you boys sure you brought everything?" she asked.

"Sure," Ralph answered.

"Then I've miscalculated. I thought there was more meat and some more prunes and dried apricots." Her list had been burned in the cabin.

At Jack's urging, Ralph made another feeding shelf for the birds. Little could be spared for them, but Jack put out some crumbs and a piece of freshened fat. One morning Lawrence discovered that the whole chunk of fat was gone.

"Those rascally squirrels, I suppose," said Ralph.

"Come out doors a minute," Larry answered. "I want to show you something."

Ralph followed him to the tree where the shelf was. Larry pointed silently to the snow. There, among the bird tracks, were a number of big prints, much larger than squirrel or rabbit tracks, but not those of a man.

"A dog," Ralph said. "Where in the world did a dog come from?"

"Do you really think it was a dog?"

"Why you see the tracks. They're certainly dog tracks. What else —" Ralph stopped suddenly.

"A wolf!" he exclaimed.

Lawrence nodded. "Very likely. Evidently

there was only one. You can see his trail both going and coming. From the looks of these tracks around the tree, I should say he must have stood on his hind legs to reach that nail. He was the thief all right. There are no squirrel tracks around here."

"Well," said Ralph, "since there was only one, there is a possibility that it may have been a dog after all. Some one may have left him here in the fall, or he may belong to that man. At any rate we don't need to say anything to the others till we know. We may never see any more of him."

"We shall if we hang out any more fat," Larry returned.

So Ralph suggested to the others that they put out no more fat for the birds. They might need every scrap themselves before spring, he said, and must not waste any. The birds knew how to take care of themselves anyway. The next morning Margaret told him that something had upset the garbage box and had spilled everything that was not frozen down.

The tracks looked as if there might have been two of the animals, but Ralph and Larry could not be sure. The trail led to the place where they had emptied the garbage and fish cleanings when the box was full. The animal had tried to dig down through the snow into the frozen mass. From there the tracks led to the woods. The boys could

see distinctly that the beast had either made the trip back and forth twice or that there had been two of them.

The older boys could not very well help telling Margaret and Jack that the visitor was probably a wolf. Meg was not surprised. She had thought of that possibility herself.

"We won't leave anything in that box by the door over night," she said. "I wish there was some way we could burn our garbage."

"There's a big, old can, with the bottom partly rusted out, in that closet under the stairs," Ralph answered. "Perhaps we can make an incinerator of it."

They set the can up on some blocks, and, the holes furnishing a draft, they found they could easily burn the garbage in it.

The next morning there were some new wolf tracks around the house, but after that the young people saw no more of them. A few days later Larry, returning after dark from his fishing holes, heard what he thought was the howling of wolves in the distance.

"If they take it into their heads to come around again," he said, "we may have use for that gun of Knut Thorsen's we brought over here."

"I never shot a gun half a dozen times in my life," Ralph returned. "Perhaps we'd better practice up a bit."

So he and Lawrence began practicing with the rifle the next day. They were poor enough shots at first, but they learned rapidly. Ralph had the more accurate eye, and gave promise of becoming, with experience, a really good shot.

XXII

HARDSHIPS

THE castaways were more comfortable in some ways in the lighthouse than they had been in the cabin. Though the situation was more exposed, the house itself was warmer. It was amazing, though, how much fuel it took to keep the fires going in two stoves and a fireplace, and how much wood cutting the boys had to do. They could use their snowshoes but little in the thick woods, and floundering around in the snow, carrying or dragging logs to the sled, was even harder than the actual ax work.

Fishing through the ice, though not such hard work physically, was becoming decidedly monotonous too. It was necessary, however, for them to catch as many fish as possible, as their stores were rapidly diminishing. Some of their supplies had been lost in the fire, and at least half of the vegetables and many of the canned goods they had saved from the flames, were spoiled by freezing. The squirrels had carried away part of the beans and peas, and the mysterious thief had helped himself to meat, dried fruit and sugar, besides destroying a quantity of flour and meal. The young folks' appetites were

hearty, and it was astonishing how fast their food supplies disappeared. So a part of each day was devoted to watching for the little flags to rise and indicate a bite. The bitter wind swept the ice, and the work was often discouraging, when, as happened all too frequently, hours were spent in this way without a fish to show for all their discomfort.

Margaret's tasks were even more monotonous than the boys' work, for, whatever happened, they must eat three times a day. It was cook and wash dishes and wash and iron and mend their clothes, most of the time for her. What spare time she had she spent in knitting. She had completed mittens, caps and one pair of stockings each for all of them before the boys made their last trip to the other harbor, and, after making another pair of stockings all around, she set to work to knit mufflers.

The few books had been burned in the cabin, with the exception of three, a novel, a work on geology and a book of travels, that the boys had found when poking around in the charred remains. Though scorched and blackened, the three books were still readable, and they read them over and over again until they fairly knew them by heart. Larry said he was even tempted to try reading them backwards. The lads had made a new checker board and a set of chessmen, so crudely carved that the players had some difficulty telling kings from bishops and knights from pawns. It was often a problem to find amuse-

ments that would serve for relaxation on stormy days and in the evenings, when they were not tired enough to go to bed immediately after the evening meal.

Looking off across the snow-covered woods and the desolate waste of frozen lake made them feel so lonely and forsaken that they seldom climbed the tower stairs. Often they discussed the possibility of crossing to the mainland on the ice, but they always came to the conclusion that, as long as they were fairly comfortable where they were, the risk of such an attempt was too great. There was seldom a day when they could not see somewhere what appeared to be open water. Of course their view was out over the wide stretch of lake to east and southeast. It was possible that the ice might extend clear across from the northwest shore of the island to the mainland, but even if the ice was firm, to reach civilization they must travel at least fifty miles, exposed to the bitter cold and in constant danger of a change of weather that might bring blinding snow or fog.

Occasionally in the evening Margaret and the boys climbed to the platform for a good view of the northern lights. Sometimes the lights were all of one color, white, pale green or faintly rosy, now almost stationary, again shooting up in columns and breaking out in spreading rays. On other nights they filled the whole northern sky with wavering, many colored flames, fading away in one place only to flash out in another. The Elliots often wondered

if, somewhere in the far north, their Uncle Frank was watching the *aurora borealis* too. He was the only near relative they had left, and it was nearly two years now since they had seen him, for he had gone north with an arctic exploring expedition. Meg remembered his telling her once that some of the northern Indians believed the dancing rays to be the spirits of their dead friends, while others said the lights were far away in the land of the giants, and came from the wavering torches carried by those great and dreadful beings at their nightly fishing.

As yet the young people were not really suffering, but they were finding their life far harder than they had dreamed it would be. As the days of work and loneliness, of cold and isolation, of anxiety in regard to supplies and never ceasing effort to keep warm and comfortable, went by, they awoke to a full realization of their situation.

Of course there was nothing to do but make the best of things, and they tried to keep cheerful and not to complain, but they did not always succeed by any means. They were cross and sharp at times, especially when they were tired, they fretted when little things went wrong, were inclined to find fault with one another, to argue about petty things, and to grow excited over the arguments. As the days went on, these habits grew. In fact they were getting too much of one another's society. Jack was the

best natured of the four, but even he was fussy and cranky too often.

Finally, on the last day of January, their irritability, which had been growing for a month, came to a head one evening in a general quarrel. Some little thing of no consequence started the trouble, and they fell to arguing and then to quarreling. Jack was impertinent, and Ralph boxed his ears and sent him to bed. Margaret flared up and took Jack's part. Ralph said unpleasant things in reply, Larry interfered, and Meg bolted from the room in tears. Then Larry and Ralph had it out, each growing angrier and more unreasonable every moment, until Larry said he had taken all he could stand, and that they must go out in the snow next morning and fight it out. Ralph agreed, and they dropped their dispute, and both went to bed in sullen silence.

Ralph was so angry he could not sleep, but, as he lay there, he began to cool off. There came to his mind a story his Uncle Frank had told about two men who wintered together in the arctic, fell to arguing, then to quarreling, went crazy, and fought till one was dead and the other so badly hurt that he froze to death. That story took hold of the boy's imagination.

"That's what we'll be coming to if we don't stop this scrapping," he thought. "We've got to stop it. There are a couple of months of this thing before us

yet. We must call a halt on ourselves, and I'm the worst one of the lot."

He lay awake for a long time and thought the thing out. It was Larry's turn next morning to make the fires, but Ralph slipped out of bed early and had them all going before the older boy got up. When he came into the kitchen, he looked at Ralph rather sheepishly.

"I thought it was my turn to get up first," he said hesitatingly.

"It was, but I happened to wake, so I thought — See here, Larry, I was to blame last night and I'm sorry. I don't want to fight. Do you?"

"No," the other answered flushing. "You weren't any more to blame than I was. Let's call it all off."

"Agreed. We've all been making idiots of ourselves, and, — I've been thinking — we've got to quit it or — we'll all go crazy before the next two months are up."

"That's just what I think. I don't know what's been the matter with me lately, but I think I can behave myself if I try hard enough."

Just then Margaret came in, and a little later Jack. Neither of them said anything about the night before. When breakfast was over, Ralph placed the matter before them all. Meg said she had been thinking about it too. They talked it over, and agreed to try to be less impatient. To

help them to self-control, they decided to lay penalties for ill temper. When they were cross or cranky, Larry and Ralph agreed to chop wood for half an hour as punishment, Jack to shovel snow, and Margaret to scour the pots and pans, the work she hated most. After their resolution to behave themselves, things went better for a while, for they tried harder to make the best of what could not be helped.

The food supply was beginning to run alarmingly low. The stock of salt meat would not last until spring unless fish and game were obtained to eke it out, but fishing was yielding almost nothing, although the boys cut holes in all sorts of places, even going a mile or more out on the lake. It seemed to them that perhaps hunting might be more successful, so they began to frequent the woods, following the hare and squirrel tracks, and lying in wait in bushes and thickets. Of course it was easy to tell the dainty, little pairs of footprints, ending abruptly at a tree, or at a hole in the snow where the squirrel had sought for some of his buried stores or had run through a tunnel in the snow to another tree, from the larger, bunched tracks of a hare. A hare's tracks do not resemble those of any other animal except his short-eared, first cousin the rabbit.

The first time Ralph went hunting he found plenty of tracks, but the only thing he succeeded in bagging was one squirrel. He followed one hare trail for some time, noticing from the prints in the snow

where the animal had crouched to browse a birch shoot or a bit of tender bark, or had sat up on its haunches for a moment to take an observation, leaving the mark of its little bunch of a tail. He could easily imagine the hare, ears up, bulging eyes looking behind as well as before, and nose wrinkled, to catch a new or dangerous scent. The trail ended abruptly in a bush, where there were plain signs of a scuffle. In the snow, with the marks of the animal's body and paws, were distinctly printed X's, the marks of big claws. Some large bird had not only killed, but carried off the hare. Later, as Ralph was going home in the dusk, he heard the long drawn hoot of an owl.

"There's the fellow that got the hare," he thought. "That's his hunting cry. I should think such a racket as that would scare the game all away."

"I'm afraid we'll have to set some snares," he said when he was displaying his lone squirrel to Meg and Larry. "There are plenty of tracks, but it's hard to get a glimpse of a hare."

"We're not out of meat yet," Lawrence replied. "Let's not take to trapping till we have to. I don't so much mind shooting a hare, though I should never do it for pleasure. I would rather hunt with a camera. But I hate traps. They're such cruel, unsportsmanlike things. Did you ever see a rabbit in a snare?"

"No."

"Well, I have, hanging by its neck in a noose, its tongue sticking out and its eyes bulging. I've never wanted to trap anything since. Shooting is over in a minute, but I'd hate to torture my game by hanging it."

"I hadn't thought of it that way," Ralph answered, "but I guess I agree with you. We won't try snaring till we have to, at any rate."

That night there was a light snow, and when Larry went into the woods two days later, he was surprised to see how few hare tracks were to be found. Squirrels were still plentiful, and he succeeded in getting three. Then the squirrels seemed to disappear. Several times Lawrence or Ralph went hunting, but not an animal of any kind did they come across.

They saw a new trail that puzzled them. The prints were like the cat tracks they had seen around the burned house, but larger. The mark left by a wolf's foot is a good deal like that of a dog, but these tracks were more like those of a cat, only much bigger and farther apart. Evidently some new beast was frequenting the neighborhood.

XXIII

THE HUNTER IS HUNTED

ONE day, as he was returning from an unsuccessful hunt, Ralph found the trails of two hares. "These are certainly new tracks," he said to himself. "I wonder if I'd have a better chance of bagging a hare if I came out at night. Rabbits are sort of nocturnal animals, but I don't know about hares."

As he went on towards the lighthouse, he was thinking about making a night trip, when he became conscious that something was following him. He did not hear it or see it, but he felt that it was there. Turning in his tracks, he looked about him. There was not a sign of life anywhere. He went on again, but the feeling persisted. He swung around suddenly and glanced quickly about. It was getting dim under the trees and in the thickets, but his eyes were keen. He had used them so much in the woods of late that he had gained a good deal of confidence in his ability to discover the live things, even when they remained half hidden and motionless. After the first quick glance, he stood perfectly still, examining every bush and tree carefully and searchingly. Not

a thing out of the ordinary could he find. He listened attentively. The rustling of the breeze in the trees and the sharp strokes of a woodpecker drilling a spruce were the only sounds.

Since the day they had dug out the buried sleds, he and Larry had seen no traces of the mysterious man, and they had concluded that their strange enemy had taken himself off to some other part of the island. Now Ralph was wondering if it was the man who was following him. The boy could get sight or sound of nothing suspicious, but he could not rid himself of the uncomfortable feeling. In spite of his attempts to convince himself that it was all nonsense, he found himself watching the woods closely on either side, and even looking over his shoulder from time to time. Not until he was clear of the trees and out on the snow-covered ice, did the sensation of being followed leave him. He said nothing to the others about the experience, for he was afraid it might have been merely imagination.

The next evening Ralph tried a night hunt. Margaret did not like the idea of his going into the woods alone after dark, but he was determined. He insisted that Larry remain at the lighthouse with her and Jack, for he did not want to leave them alone there at night, with the mysterious man prowling about perhaps. To allay Meg's fears, he promised her that if he heard a wolf or even saw a

wolf track, he would return as fast as he could. He did not mention the cat-like trail.

Leaving the lighthouse, he followed the path to the fishing camp, and then started across the ice to the main shore. It was a clear, still, very cold night, and the hard, brilliant moonlight set the snow glittering as if powdered with diamond dust, while the evergreens and bare-branched trees of the forest looked inky black between snow and sky. He felt a bit uneasy about entering the dark woods, but he laughed at himself and went ahead.

Once in the woods, he was obliged to go cautiously, not only to avoid making any noise that would startle possible game, but because, in the darkness among the trees, where the moonlight shone through only in ghostly streaks and patches, it was often difficult to see and feel his way. He was the more careful, too, because he was alone, and he did not like to risk tripping in a tangle of small evergreens or over a half buried log. To disable himself when alone in the woods at night might be a serious matter. So, all the conditions making for caution, he went very slowly.

He had entered the wood at the same place where he had come out the day before. His trail showed distinctly, and before long he found the hare tracks he had noticed. Perhaps one of the little beasts might take it into its head to come the same way again, he thought, so he concealed himself in the

shadow of a spruce and waited for a while. No hare appeared, however, and, after standing quiet until he began to chill, he wanted to be moving again.

He started to follow the trail, keeping to one side of it, so as not to destroy it. The hare had been moving rapidly, for the larger prints of its hind feet showed ahead and to either side of the smaller, closer set marks of the fore feet. In making a detour around a thick clump of balsams, Ralph lost the tracks for a few minutes. While he was hunting for them, he again felt the queer sensation he had noticed the day before, the feeling of being followed. In a moment he was certain something was after him. There was a prickly sensation in the back of his neck, and he shivered a little. He turned, as he had done before, and peered into the gloom of the trees behind him and on either side. Surely there was nothing moving. If there was anything alive there, it must have stopped when he stopped. Ahead of him lay an open space flooded with moonlight. He would trick the man or animal, if there was one.

He went forward hastily, less cautious about noise now, out into the moonlit space and straight across it. Then, just as he reached the other side, he swung quickly about, lifting his rifle. He had hoped the thing, increasing its speed to keep up with him, might come out into the open. But the snowy

stretch lay still and undisturbed, marred only by his track across it. At one side, however, in the gloom of the trees, he thought he discerned a slight movement, some dark bulk moving slowly. But if there really was something moving, it stopped or disappeared in an instant. Again Ralph could see no sign of life. He stood still for several minutes, irresolute, uncertain whether to lay the singular feeling that possessed him to imagination and to continue his hunting, or to turn about and retrace his steps.

As he paused, there sounded, near at hand, an appalling "Hoo — ooo — hoo — o — ooo — ah." Coming so suddenly out of the stillness, it seemed to fill the whole air. It made the boy start with fright. In an instant down on his head swooped a great owl, the tip of his wing almost touching the lad's cap. Ralph certainly jumped that time, and barely restrained himself from crying out, as the owl swept by and was lost to sight in a moment.

The reason for the bird's terrifying hunting cry had become clear. The owl counted on startling a small bird or animal, so that it would jump or tremble. Then he located the poor beast by the slight noise, a rustle in a bush, or a scrape on the bark of a tree, or something of the sort, and pounced on it. That was what had happened to the hare, whose track Ralph had seen a few days before. The lad did not think all this out until afterward, however.

At that moment his mind was occupied with something else.

Even as he started he had seen something move — there could be no doubt of it — a black shape, close by in the shadow of a bush, had stirred. For an instant he had caught the gleam of eyes. It was only for an instant, but he was sure. He was being followed by some animal, a wolf perhaps.

Ralph was frightened. The stillness, broken only by the owl's cry, the darkness, the loneliness, the skulking, black form, the gleaming eyes, the queer feeling that he, the hunter, was being hunted, were enough to frighten any one. His first impulse was to make tracks for home as fast as he could go, but, with an effort, he restrained himself. To run from the animal, to show fear, would be the worst thing he could do. He would retrace his trail, and get out of the woods as soon as he safely could, but he would not run. Of course he might shoot at the place where he had seen the eyes, but he doubted the wisdom of doing that. He could not make out the beast. He would probably miss, or, worse still, he might wound it just a little, enough to make it attack him. He remembered the big cat tracks he had seen not far from that place. If the animal was one of the cat tribe it might show fight. Had Larry been with him, armed too, Ralph might have risked the shot, but he was alone, and prudence restrained him.

All these things flashed through the boy's mind in a moment. Quietly, forcing himself to move deliberately, he started back across the moonlit space. He held his gun ready to lift, and he kept his eye on the edge of the gloom, but he saw no more of the gleaming eyes, no movement of a dim shape. He crossed the open space and entered the shadows again, following his own trail. For some minutes he went on without hearing a sound or catching a movement.

A little way ahead of him, a partly dead tree leaned out at an angle. His trail lay under it. Part of the leaning trunk was in the moonlight, the rest in shadow. As he drew near he was struck with something singular about that tree. The part in shadow seemed curiously thickened. He stopped still and gazed at it intently. Surely the tree had not looked like that when he came that way before. There was something wrong with it.

A little to his left there was a slight rustle in a thicket. He moved cautiously towards it. As he approached he came into the shadow of a clump of evergreens. There he stood for a moment perfectly still, his attention divided between the bush and the leaning tree.

There was another little rustle in the bush. A hare jumped out into the moonlight near the tree. Ralph raised his gun to shoot, but he did not fire. Before he was ready, the hare, leaping along the

track, had come directly under the leaning tree. Then suddenly the thickened part of the tree moved. A round head came out into the moonlight. A paw shot out. There was a snarl. The beast that had been lying along the tree trunk launched itself down on the hare. It missed its aim. The hare made a tremendous bound into a thicket, and the big beast uttered a screech of disappointed rage. That screech sent the cold shivers down Ralph's spine. The animal dropped from the tree to the moonlit snow, and for an instant the lad had a clear view of it, a creature three or four times the size of an ordinary cat, with a round head something like a cat, but longer legs in proportion to its body. In the moonlight its coat looked a sort of brown-gray, and it had a short tail and tufts on its ears.

The sudden appearance and blood-curdling screech had startled Ralph so that he forgot to shoot. When he did think to raise his rifle, it was too late. The big cat had leaped back into the shadow, and suddenly was gone. Strain his eyes as he might, the boy could get no glimpse of the beast.

He stood still for a few moments before venturing to continue on his way. Then it occurred to him that the slinking, silent, fierce animal might be manœuvering at that moment for an attack on him. He resumed his journey at once. He went a little faster than before, but none the less cautiously. All the time he had the uncomfortable feeling that the

great, noiseless cat might be close behind or hiding in every shadowy place of the way. His main desire was to get to open ground as soon as possible, and before the moon went down.

It was not until he was well out of the woods, and speeding across the harbor, that the fear of the creeping beast left him. He knew then what had left the cat-like tracks, and had, in all probability, frightened away the hares and squirrels.

Then a queer thing happened. For weeks Ralph had not seen a hare near the lighthouse. But that night, as he came out of the woods a little way behind the house, a big, white hare bounded right across his path. He fired, sprang forward, and stooped to secure his prize. Then some heavy thing fell upon his back, his face was driven down into the snow. He tried to struggle, but something struck him a sharp blow on the head, and his senses left him.

XXIV

TRACKING THE STRANGE MAN

WHEN Ralph came to, he was lying face down in the snow. He was dazed, his head ached, and for a few moments he did not know what had happened to him. Then he remembered. He struggled to his feet. His hand still grasped the rifle, but the hare he had killed was gone. The moonlight flooded the snow, and he could see clearly his own tracks and those of the creature that had come up behind him, jumped on his back, forced him down into the snow, seized his game, and then had made off at full speed.

Though Ralph was stiff and numb with cold, he started to follow those tracks. They led him around the lighthouse and into the woods, but before he had gone far he realized that, in his present state, pursuit was useless. His head ached frightfully from the blow he had received, he was dizzy and sick. After he had stumbled and fallen the third time, he gave up. He did not know how long he had lain unconscious, long enough at any rate for his enemy to get a good start. Even if he succeeded in overtaking that enemy, Ralph realized that he was in

no condition just then for a fight. He would inevitably get the worst of the encounter.

He turned back to the lighthouse, brushed the snow from his clothes, and hammered on the door. It was Lawrence who admitted him, but Margaret was close behind.

The moment she saw her brother's face, she cried out, "Ralph, what is the matter? Are you hurt?"

"Not to amount to anything," he replied, taking hold of the door frame to steady himself. "I fell down and bumped my head. It aches a little." That was all the explanation he would give of the lump on the back of his head, though he could see that both Larry and Meg doubted his story.

They had good reason to doubt it, as he was to learn. About a half hour before, Jack having gone to bed, the two had been sitting in the living-room, Meg knitting and Lawrence reading aloud from the much read book of travels, when, moved by some common impulse, they had both glanced up at the window. There they saw distinctly a face looking in, a wild, haggard face, with gleaming eyes and unkempt beard. In an instant it was gone.

Larry sprang up and ran to the back door, but Meg called after him not to go into danger and leave her alone. So he contented himself with opening the door and looking out. The man had the start of him anyway.

"You boys," said Margaret, when he had closed

the door, "have tried to make me believe there wasn't any one spying on us, but you can't keep that up any longer. I've suspected for a long time, and I've been very sure ever since Christmas Eve." Then she told him of seeing the same face that night.

Lawrence, in turn, confessed about the tracks he and Ralph had found, their attempt to follow them, and the robbery of the store-room at the fishing camp. "Of course," he explained, "it wouldn't be a bit worse for him to take those provisions than it was for us to do it, if he had been open and straightforward about it. We never would have grudged him his share, but he seems to be afraid of us, and yet he wants to deprive us of what he doesn't need himself. So we have to watch out for him and be on our guard against him."

Ralph listened to their story, but it was not until Margaret had gone to bed that he told Larry of the attack on himself. They agreed that they must follow the strange man's trail, and try at least to find out what he was and where he came from.

Ralph's head ached so that he found it hard to sleep that night, but he dropped off at last. When he rose in the morning he was still weak and dizzy, and it was afternoon before he felt equal to pursuing his enemy.

Telling Margaret they were going hunting, the two lads started out, Lawrence with the rifle and Ralph carrying an ax. They examined the tracks

carefully. The footprints were distinct, but those made by the right foot were more deeply marked. This fact, together with the irregularity and unequal spacing, convinced the boys that the man must be lame in one leg, and that he was wearing badly worn out shoes or moccasins. The peculiarities in the trail were more apparent at first, where he had evidently been running, than farther on, where he had slowed his pace.

The tracks led to the ridge on the northwest side of the little bay beyond the house, and along the rock clearing the four explorers had followed on their first visit to the lighthouse. Beyond the head of the bay, the trail turned into the swamp. That swamp was a veritable tangle of fallen and standing trees and undergrowth. Why any one should want to go through such a place the boys were at a loss to understand. In summer it would have been almost impossible to penetrate, and even when it was frozen and snow-covered it was difficult enough to cross. Snowshoes could not be used at all, and following the trail, that curved and bent and circled in the most erratic manner, was slow work.

After ten or fifteen minutes of such going, the boys came upon a small windfall, where the man had evidently gone down on his hands and knees and crawled under two cedars. The trees had fallen against each other, their interlocking branches holding them up so that an opening was left between the

trunks and the snow, about three feet high at its apex. Ralph dropped down on his knees to follow the trail through the hole, but Larry laid hands on him and pulled him back.

"Wait a minute," he whispered. "The creature may be hiding in there now. He may get the advantage of us. Let's see if the trail stops here or comes out somewhere."

Realizing the wisdom of caution, Ralph drew back. The two then started to circle the windfall. On the other side, about opposite the place where the man had crawled into the tangle, the trail issued through a clump of bushes.

"He went on again all right," said Ralph, "but before we follow I want a look at that hole. Maybe it's where he lives."

"Let's go in on the other side," Larry replied. "It will be easier."

They retraced their steps and crawled under the interlocking trees. There, under slanting trunks and tangled branches, was a hole like the lair of a wild animal. The frozen ground was almost bare of snow and was strewn with branches that had been broken off to make a space about four feet high and five feet across each way. The light was dim in the strange burrow, and Ralph struck a match. As the flame flickered, it showed upon the ground the torn, bloody skin and broken bones of a hare.

"There's all that's left of my hare," cried Ralph.

The boys examined the remains of the animal, then stared at each other in consternation.

"He ate it raw," said Ralph.

Larry nodded. "Tore the skin off and gnawed the bones," he said.

"What sort of a thing is he?" Ralph exclaimed. "Do you suppose it can be an animal after all, Larry?"

"Not with those tracks. Besides, Meg and I saw him." Lawrence was silent for a moment. Then he said slowly, "Ralph, I don't know what sort of a creature that man is, but he must be starving to eat a hare raw. It looks as if he had had a fire here too, but he couldn't wait to cook his meat."

The strange man's unexplainable behavior made the boys more eager than ever to track him down. The trail led them through the swamp, and up the ridge bounding the second and larger bay they had visited on their first trip to the lighthouse. To the summit of this ridge, which was probably not more than a hundred feet high, and along the top, the tracks ran. The ridge top was open rock, with scattering jack pines growing in the depressions and crevices, and other trees in the occasional transverse gullies. The wind had swept some parts almost bare of snow and packed it hard in others, so the footprints were more difficult to trace.

While following the ridge, the lads noticed a number of hare tracks. Once, when Lawrence paused to

glance at what seemed to be a fresh track, he heard a rustling in a tree-clothed gully just ahead. Motioning to Ralph to keep still, Larry crept forward cautiously. Just as he reached the edge of the gully, a hare leaped into plain sight between two trees. Larry was prepared for a quick shot and made it successfully. The trip had not been in vain, whether the strange man was overtaken or not. When, a little farther along, he succeeded in shooting another hare, both boys were so pleased that the chase they had started on seemed of minor consequence. The really important thing was that they were going to have fresh meat for dinner.

They followed the ridge beyond the head of the harbor, until they reached a place where they could look down on a small lake, perhaps a half mile long. There, on the wind-swept rock, they lost the trail, and were obliged to hunt for it. In his search, Lawrence came upon a deep, irregularly shaped hole, partly filled with snow from which two jack pines projected.

"Ralph, come here and see this queer looking place," he called. "I wonder if it can be one of the old Indian pits." The book on geology, which had been saved from the fire, mentioned in a foot note that old Indian copper mines had been found on the island.

As Ralph turned at Larry's call, he saw his friend move forward a few steps, slip and clutch wildly

at a dead pine that slanted out over the hole. He grasped a branch, but the tree, balanced on the edge and ready to fall, needed scarcely more than a touch to make it lose its insecure hold. Down went the boy to the bottom of the pit, the tree crashing after him.

XXV

THE LYNX

RALPH sprang forward. As the cloud of flying snow settled, he could see his companion lying on his face, his right leg caught under the fallen tree. Ralph scrambled down the slope, and was relieved to see that Larry was conscious. He twisted about a little, and tried to pull his foot out. When Ralph reached him, he was groaning with pain.

"I can't budge my foot," he said, "and it hurts to try." Then he added, in an effort to make the best of the accident, "It's bruised a bit I guess. I'm not hurt anywhere else."

The foot was wedged under the trunk where there were no branches. Ralph attempted to move the tree enough to release his friend, but, with all his efforts, he could not lift it. Perhaps if he cut off some of the branches and lightened it, he might manage to raise it, he thought. He had chopped off two of the larger branches, when another idea occurred to him. Why not cut the tree trunk a little above where Larry's foot was pinned? He could surely lift the section remaining. But at the first stroke of Ralph's ax on the trunk, Larry cried out

sharply. The blow jarred the tree just enough to cause a new pressure on his foot.

"Try it farther up," he said, when Ralph had explained what he wanted to do.

Ralph did so, and, though the pressure still hurt Lawrence, it was not more than he could bear. After chopping through the trunk, Ralph was able to raise the section under which Larry's foot was caught, so that the latter could draw it out. When Ralph reached his side, he found the injured boy ghastly white, and the perspiration standing out on his face.

"I'm almost afraid my foot's crushed some," he said.

"We'll have to get you home before we can tell."

Every movement of his hurt foot pained Lawrence frightfully, and a very few steps caused him to almost faint away.

"I can help you up the bank," said Ralph, "but you never can walk all the way home, and I don't believe I can carry you that far on my back. It must be about three miles."

"Of course you can't carry me. I'll have to walk somehow."

"You mustn't even try." Ralph was emphatic. "You might get your foot in such shape it never would get well. There's only one thing to do. I'll have to leave you here and go back for the toboggan. You'll be better sheltered down here than up in the

wind, so we won't try to get you out of the hole for the present. It will take me some time to make the trip. I can't possibly get back before dark. I'm going to make you as comfortable as I can first. We mustn't let your foot freeze. It's beginning to snow too."

Hastening back to a tree-covered gully, that crossed the ridge, Ralph stripped from an old birch some big sheets of bark, all he could carry. He made a second trip to cut two slender aspens, from which he trimmed most of the branches. With a snowshoe he scraped away the snow around one of the pines that grew in the hole. He was surprised to uncover a patch of wintergreen and bearberry plants, their glossy leaves looking as fresh and green as in summer. He strewed part of the cleared space with pine boughs. Then he set the big sheets of bark up so they would rest against the tree and the two poles, making a primitive shelter that would protect Lawrence from the falling snow. A small space just within the entrance to the leanto had been left free of branches, and there, within a framework of green logs to keep it from spreading, Ralph kindled a fire, taking care to place it so the flames could not reach the bark covering. Beside the fire he piled enough fuel to last until he made the trip to the lighthouse and back. Dusk had come by the time he was ready to start.

Lawrence was surprised that it did not seem colder

in the leanto. He felt quite warm, and, except for his aching foot, very comfortable, as he sat there between the jack pine and the fire, chewing a winter-green leaf and drowsily listening to the crackling of the birch wood, the rustling of the pine needles in the light breeze, and the soft thud of an occasional mass of snow falling from the tree. As darkness came on, his drowsiness increased, and presently he fell asleep.

He woke suddenly with a most uncomfortable feeling of danger. He could hear a slight noise, a crunching as of an animal eating a bone. The fire had died down to little more than embers. Beyond the coals gleamed two bright eyes. Larry sat motionless. The eyes turned away, the crunching began again. Ralph had taken one of the hares with him for the evening meal, but had left the other lying near the fire. Something was feasting on that hare. Larry could see enough to make out that the thief was not a man, but an animal of some kind. At the thought of losing that fresh meat, sudden anger stirred the boy. He reached for the rifle that lay beside him. His movement disturbed the beast. Again the gleaming eyes turned towards him. Then Larry fired.

There was a fierce, cat-like screech, and Larry struggled to his feet. His shot had wounded the animal slightly. A second shot missed entirely.

The big cat did not run, but crouched down, silent, its angry eyes watching its enemy, its stub of a tail twitching nervously. Before Larry could fire again, it uttered another of its fierce screeches and sprang straight at him. He jumped back, his injured foot doubled under him, and he went down. His backward jump had saved him, however, for the animal landed in front of him, not on him, one cruel, outstretched claw tearing his trousers leg and scratching through to the skin.

At the same instant there was a shout, and Ralph, ax raised, burst into the leanto. His ax descended on the beast's head, smashing the skull. He had put all the strength he could muster into that quick blow.

Ralph struck a match, and the two boys examined the dead beast. "Is this like the animal that followed you last night?" Lawrence asked.

"I don't know whether that was what was after me," Ralph replied, "but it's like the beast that jumped out of the tree. It's the same color as near as I can tell, and it has tufts on its ears, and great big pads of feet and a stub of a tail. It's the same thing all right. Is it a wild cat or a lynx?"

"A Canada lynx. It was lucky for me you came when you did. They are ugly beasts when wounded. I've always heard so, and now I know it."

Climbing up the steep slope was a hard task for

Larry, but he undertook it pluckily, and, with Ralph's help, succeeded at last. There Ralph settled him on the toboggan, and wrapped him in a blanket.

They went along the ridge to the head of the little bay. Ralph had trouble taking the toboggan with Larry on it across the tree-clothed gully. He knew crossing the swamp was out of the question. On his trip from the lighthouse he had come along the ice of the bay, and had found a partly open expanse of ridge side where he had climbed to the summit. Now he took Lawrence down the same way, exerting all his strength to hold the toboggan back from making too swift a descent. The ice reached safely, they went down the bay to its mouth and along close to shore. Luckily the falling snow was not thick enough to be confusing even in the darkness.

Lawrence did not make a sound of complaint all the way home, but after Ralph had carried him from the sled, had put him in his bunk, and was taking off his moccasin, he almost fainted away. Margaret pulled the pillow out from under his head, and bathed his forehead with cold water, while Ralph proceeded to remove the woolen stocking. He was relieved to see that there was no blood on it, but when he looked at the foot itself he whistled sharply. It was badly discolored, and in some places the blood had settled just under the skin, but the skin itself was not broken, and Larry could move his toes. The three could not find that there were any bones broken,

but the ankle was sprained and as painful as the foot.

"It's lucky your whole foot wasn't crushed," Ralph exclaimed. "It must have been the snow that saved it."

"I've no right to complain," Larry answered pluckily, "if nothing's broken. To tell the truth, I thought at first the whole thing was smashed to a pulp."

"And no doctor nearer than fifty miles away," said Margaret soberly.

XXVI

CHASED BY WOLVES

NO one knew just what to do for Lawrence's foot, which swelled badly and turned all sorts of colors. He could not step on it, and Ralph put the cot in the living-room for him, so he would not have to go back and forth from one room to another. Meg's bed was moved to the kitchen. The snow storm had so effaced the mysterious man's tracks that Ralph could not have followed them even if he had dared risk the attempt alone.

A few days after Larry's injury, Ralph was obliged to go for more wood. Jack would have gone with him to help, but he was suffering from a slight attack of indigestion. So Margaret accompanied her brother. Carrying wood, she said, would at least be a change from housework.

Ralph felled a spruce, trimmed off the branches, and cut the trunk in lengths they could handle. The sun set as they neared the end of their task, and through the woods there came to them the faint, far away howl of a wolf. Meg was startled, but Ralph reassured her.

"That fellow is a long way off," he said.

"We've heard wolves several times when we have been cutting wood, but they have never come anywhere near us."

A little later they heard the howling again, and that time it was not so far away. It sounded like the voices of several wolves, and Ralph thought the time had come to make speed.

"We'll take out this last load," he said, "and then we'll make tracks for home."

While they were putting the wood on the toboggan, they heard the wolves again, altogether too near for comfort. Seizing the rope, they got away as rapidly as they could. They had just cleared the shore and reached the open harbor, where they could go faster, when the howling came once more, so near that it thoroughly startled them. They made a new effort to get ahead. A moment later Margaret looked back over her shoulder, and uttered a little cry.

"Ralph, look there!"

He looked. Three,—four, lean, dark, dog-like shapes had emerged from the woods near the place where the toboggan had been. They were big timber wolves.

"Drop the rope," Ralph ordered. "We'll leave the sled here. Go on as fast as you can, but steadily. Don't get scared." He remembered that he had read that one must not run from wolves.

A moment later he looked back again. The four

beasts seemed to be following, but they were not coming very fast. They sank down in the soft, upper layer of new fallen snow more than Meg and Ralph did with their snowshoes.

"Why didn't I have sense enough to bring the gun?" Ralph thought.

Then he remembered that he had left his only weapon, the ax, in the toboggan. Telling Meg to go on, he started back. When he turned, the wolves stopped and stood watching him.

"They don't seem to be very brave," he thought, encouraged.

He reached the toboggan, picked up the ax, and was about to go on after Margaret, when there occurred to him a device that might frighten the beasts. Hastily he gathered up a handful of twigs and chips, made a little pile in the trail, lighted it and added some larger pieces.

By the time he was ready to start on, Meg was some distance ahead. As soon as he began to move forward, the wolves followed. At first he did not try to overtake his sister, but went on steadily, armed with the ax, and glancing back now and then. The animals came on in the trail of the sled until they neared the fire. Then they paused, as Ralph had hoped they would, and stood still watching the queer thing, and evidently fearing to approach it. After a little, one of them started to make a detour to the



Ralph realized that this beast was manœuvering
to head them off.

right to avoid the blaze, and presently the others followed.

The device of the fire had gained a little time for the pursued, but before long Ralph discovered that the wolves had changed their tactics. When they had circled the fire, three of them turned towards the trail again. The fourth, apparently the leader of the pack, kept on its way at some distance to the right, but increased its speed, going forward with great bounds. In an instant Ralph realized that this beast was manœuvering to head them off, while the rest of the pack came up from behind. He hastened forward to catch up with Margaret, who had nothing with which to defend herself.

In the meantime, Jack, at the lighthouse, had grown restless, and, leaving Lawrence asleep on his cot, had gone out for a little run on his snowshoes. He kept near the house, but coming to a place where he had a good view down the harbor, he saw Margaret and Ralph approaching. The sun had gone down, but there was still light enough so that he could see plainly, against the white snow, the three, dark, dog-like figures following his brother and sister.

Jack did not hesitate. He hurried to the lighthouse, kicked off his snowshoes, rushed into the kitchen, seized the rifle and ammunition, dashed out again, resumed his snowshoes, and started to the rescue. It was not until he was well out on the harbor that he noticed the fourth wolf a little way

to his left and almost opposite him. Ralph shouted to him to go back, but the younger boy paid no heed. Loading the rifle as he went, he hastened forward.

As he placed the loaded weapon in Ralph's hands, the latter handed him the ax in exchange. Then Ralph turned about, and took aim at the first of the three beasts in the trail. They had drawn unpleasantly close. He had an excellent chance for a shot, and he never could explain why he missed, but he did miss, his shot going wide. The noise seemed to frighten the animals though. They shrank back, retreated a few paces and stood still.

Ralph took the occasion to go on after Margaret and Jack. Glancing ahead and to either side, he was surprised to find that the leading wolf had disappeared. Once more he turned and took aim at the three beasts in the rear, who were coming on again.

He was cooler and more careful that time. A wolf leaped back with a sharp howl, and the others turned and fled. Ralph stood still for a moment watching them. They ran but a short distance, then paused, turned back and cautiously approached the wounded beast, which was crouched down in the snow. Ralph had heard that wolves sometimes kill and devour their own wounded. He waited to see what was going to happen.

Suddenly there was a cry from Meg. Turning, the boy saw something that almost paralyzed him

for a moment. The missing leader had reappeared. In front and a little to the right lay a ridge of broken ice and heaped up snow. Gaining the shelter of that ridge, the wolf had been hidden from sight. Now, suddenly, it had come around the end, directly in their path and only a few feet ahead of Meg and Jack. Snarling, the beast faced them.

Just as Ralph turned, the wolf leaped forward. Jack raised his ax. But before he could strike, Ralph, having recovered from his momentary paralysis, fired full at the animal's breast. Fortunately Meg, a little to one side, and Jack, a few paces the other way, were out of range. The wolf leaped into the air and fell back in a heap on the snow. From behind came a chorus of long howls.

Ralph did not look back to see what was happening there. Darting forward, he seized Meg by the hand, calling to Jack at the same time. Hurrying past the motionless body of the wolf, they made full speed for the lighthouse.

They had gone some distance before Ralph turned to look back. Then he saw that the two sound wolves were slowly and hesitatingly drawing near the fallen leader, while farther back, the wounded one was dragging itself across the snow after them. The fugitives were almost home by that time. Ralph sent one more shot in the direction of the dark forms, but, though there was an answering howl, he could not tell whether he had done any

damage or not. At any rate the wolves did not attempt to resume the chase. The last glimpse Ralph had of them, through the gathering darkness, they were grouped around the motionless heap in the snow. He wondered if they would devour their dead comrade.

The three wasted no time in getting to the lighthouse. The firing had aroused Larry from his nap. He had not felt any particular concern at first, supposing Ralph, on his way back, was taking a shot at a hare. But when the long drawn howling reached his ears, he called to Jack, and, getting no answer, left his cot to hop to one window and then to another, in a vain attempt to see what was going on.

XXVII

THE FIGHT

WHETHER the wolves devoured their dead leader or not, Ralph never discovered. More snow fell that night and the next day, and when he went back for the loaded sled he could find no trace of the animals. The howling ceased, and the young people concluded that the wolves had shifted their hunting ground to some other part of the island. Ralph, however, took the precaution to carry the rifle whenever he went far from the lighthouse.

One day, nearly a week after the wolf attack, Margaret went out with Ralph again, not for wood this time, but to watch some fishing lines he had set, the day before, in holes cut in the ice a little way up the shore beyond the fishing camp. He had taken into consideration, when he left the lines over night, that they might be robbed, but it was imperative that he add to the fast diminishing food supplies. So, as he had more tackle, he had decided to take the risk.

When the two reached the holes, the tackle was safe and the uprights were lying flat. Ralph drew

up the lines and found them undisturbed. Apparently no fish had even nibbled at the hooks. After he had been watching for a bite, without result, for more than a half hour, he noticed that several squirrels were chattering in the nearby woods.

"You watch the lines, Meg," he said, "and I'll see if I can get one of those fellows. One squirrel isn't much, but it's better than no meat."

He crossed the short stretch of snow-covered ice, but by the time he reached the shore, the squirrels had scattered. He stalked one for a little way, then lost sight and sound of it. Disgusted, he turned back. As he came out of the woods, a rustling in a bush behind him caused him to look around. He stood still, hoping to get a shot at a hare.

Suddenly he was startled by a sharp cry. "Ralph, Ralph," shrieked Meg's voice.

Turning, he saw his sister struggling with a man, a ragged, wild looking creature, who was trying to take something away from her. Ralph raised his rifle, then lowered it, fearing he might hit Meg. With a shout, he sprang down the bank, and started to run across the ice. The ragged man, startled, dropped Meg's arm, at the same time relaxing his hold on the fish he had been trying to take from her. As she jumped back, she wrested the fish from him. The man gave a hoarse, inarticulate cry and sprang at her again. She turned and ran, he after her, but as he reached out his hand to lay hold of her again,

Ralph came up to them. With his clubbed rifle, he aimed a blow at the man's head. The creature turned just in time, ducked, dodged the blow, sprang up and seized Ralph around the neck, knocking the rifle from his hand.

In a moment the two were rolling in the snow in a fierce, rough and tumble fight. Ralph was strong, quick and agile. His adversary was weakened by hunger, but what he lacked in strength he made up for in fury.

He fought like a desperate animal, clawing, scratching, choking, biting. Over and over the two rolled in the snow. Now the ragged man was on top, now Ralph. He had freed his neck from his enemy's arm, but the latter was trying to sink his teeth in the boy's flesh, to get his fingers into his eyes or around his throat. There was no fair play about his methods. Ralph realized that the creature was fighting to kill.

With a quick twist and a violent effort, the lad wrenched his right arm free. Then a singular thing happened. The man suddenly collapsed and became limp. In his surprise, Ralph loosened his grip and his right hand stopped half way to the other's chin. Had he killed the man, he wondered. As quickly as they had relaxed, his adversary's muscles stiffened again. With the suddenness and slipperiness of an eel, he was out of Ralph's grasp, throwing the boy over on his face as he slipped from

underneath him. Though Ralph was on his feet in an instant, the man was up first and was making away with a limping gait, but the desperate speed of a wild animal. Ralph started in pursuit, but, with a broken snowshoe and a wrenched knee, he had no chance of overtaking that fleeing figure. Margaret, too, was calling to him to come back.

When he reached her she was down in a heap in the snow, her hand still grasping the rifle, which she had picked up to go to her brother's rescue. Her face was ghastly white. For a moment he thought she was going to faint, but when she found he was not badly hurt, she rallied.

In a few minutes she was able to tell how the man had managed to come upon her without her knowledge. The stick across one of the holes had suddenly been pulled upright, and she had knelt down by the edge to pull out the fish. It was a good sized one and gave her a hard pull, but she finally secured it. She had just struck the squirming fish on the head with a piece of wood, to put an end to its sufferings, when she heard, behind her, a queer growl, such as a hungry animal might make. She sprang to her feet, turned and found herself facing the same villainous looking creature she had seen twice through the window. As he gave a husky cry and reached for the fish, she shrieked for Ralph. The rest he had seen.

"I believe the man is crazy, Ralph," she said

shuddering. "I never saw such strange, wild eyes, and he didn't speak, but just growled and snarled like an animal."

"He's more beast than man all right," the boy answered. "I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to shoot him."

"Oh, no," his sister exclaimed, "I couldn't bear to think of your killing a man."

"I'll kill him for sure if he attacks you again," Ralph replied grimly.

"It was the fish he wanted. If I had had sense enough to drop it, I believe he would have picked it up and run without disturbing me any more. I didn't realize I was holding on to it."

"Well," said Ralph, "as long as you are not hurt, I'm glad you did hold on to it. We can have it for dinner."

They both found themselves weak and shaken now that the danger was over, and they made but slow progress to the lighthouse. Margaret insisted that they must not tell Jack about their adventure.

"We'll have to keep an eye on him," said Ralph, "and see that he doesn't get far from home alone."

"I won't let him out of my sight," replied Meg decidedly. "We don't want that creature to get a chance to attack him or even frighten him."

So they told their tale to Lawrence only, leaving Jack in apparent ignorance of the danger that had threatened his brother and sister. With Larry,

Ralph debated the advisability of trying once more to track down the strange man, but Larry advised against the attempt.

"If I could go with you," he said, "we might try it, but I don't think you ought to risk it alone, even with the gun. You couldn't shoot him on sight in cold blood, and if it came to a fight you might get the worst of it, and then where would the rest of us be?"

"I might scare him and drive him away."

"Where would you drive him to, off the island? He might discover you were tracking him, and take you by surprise, jump out of a tree on you or something like that."

Ralph had to admit the reasonableness of Larry's arguments, though he was reluctant to give up the idea of tracking down the creature that had made them so much trouble. He finally agreed not to attempt it until Larry's foot was well enough to enable him to go too. "I'm going to watch out for him every minute though," he said. "If I get a glimpse of him, I'll warn him that if he comes anywhere near the house or near any one of us again, I'll shoot him as if he were a wolf."

XXVIII

SUCCORING THE ENEMY

“**W**HERE is Jack?” asked Ralph, coming into the kitchen.

“Why I thought he was helping you.” Margaret looked alarmed.

“He did help me until the kindling was all piled, but I haven’t seen him for a half hour or more. I thought he came into the house. I’ll go look for him.”

Before Ralph reached the door, however, it burst open, and Jack almost fell in, his face flushed with excitement.

“Come quick, Ralph,” he cried. “There’s a man lying over here in the snow. I think he must be dead. You thought you could fool me and make me think I didn’t see anybody on the rocks that day, but I knew better all the time. I’ll show you now I was right.” He stopped, panting for breath.

Ralph seized his cap. “Show him to me, Jack,” he cried.

“I’m going with you,” and Meg ran for her coat. In a few moments the two were following Jack. Ralph, to be ready for any emergency, was carry-

ing the rifle. The little fellow led them along the shore and to the top of a mass of rock that ran out into the lake.

"There," he said. "There's the man I saw. He isn't a rock or a stump, is he?"

Lying in the snow was the ragged, wild looking man.

"Is he dead, Ralph, do you think?" asked Margaret. She shuddered a little as she looked down on the haggard face and matted, black beard.

"He looks like it," Ralph returned.

"Put your hand over his heart and see if it's beating," commanded Meg.

Ralph hesitated. "What's the use?" he said. "If he isn't dead now, he will be before long." The day was bitterly cold.

"If you won't do it I will," exclaimed Meg, taking a step nearer the motionless figure.

"Don't you touch him. Here, you take the gun and keep it aimed full at him. He may come to suddenly. I'll see if he's alive. If he tries any funny business, shoot him."

Margaret took the rifle, and Ralph, kneeling in the snow, put his hand inside the ragged coat.

"He's alive. He's warm yet and his heart is beating."

"We must go back and get the toboggan then. He'll freeze here in a little while."

Ralph rose to his feet. "The best thing we can



Lying in the snow was the ragged, wild-looking man.

do is to let him freeze," he said emphatically. "He's more beast than man anyway."

"Ralph," cried his sister, "that would be murder!"

"No more murder than letting a wolf or a wild cat die," he insisted.

"Yes, it would be. Whatever he is, whether he is crazy or the worst kind of a villain, he's a man, and it's our duty to keep him from dying if we can. Even wounded enemies in war are taken to hospitals and cared for, not left to die."

"But what can we do with him? There's no knowing how he may act if he comes to. He may murder us all."

"We can tie his hands and feet," replied Meg. "Then he can't do us any harm if he does come to, but I don't believe he will very soon. We must do what we can for him, whatever happens. It would be the wickedest kind of murder to leave him here."

Ralph knew she was right, though he hated to admit it. "It's up to you," he said grudgingly. "You two go for the toboggan, and I'll stay here and keep an eye on him. If he comes to, I want a word with him before he gets away. Be sure and bring some rope to tie him with."

Jack had been listening wide-eyed. "What is he, Ralph?" he half whispered, glancing at the miserable looking figure. "Is he a pirate?"

Ralph gave a short laugh. "No," he said, "I guess he isn't a pirate, but he's a bad sort and we'd rather not have anything to do with him."

"He's a poor man who has been driven nearly crazy by starvation, Jack," Meg added. "We're going to do what we can for him."

In a short time Margaret and Jack were back with the toboggan, a blanket and some stout rope. The man had shown no signs of consciousness, but Ralph, still doubting him, bade Meg cover him with the rifle until his hands and feet were bound. Then they lifted him on the toboggan. They were surprised to find him no heavier. Evidently he was not much more than skin and bone.

"I see now what's happened to him," said Ralph. "There's blood on his hair. He must have fallen and cut his head on that sharp edge of rock. Don't put that blanket over him, he's too dirty."

"Nonsense," replied Meg. "The blanket will wash. I told Lawrence to make a good fire in the bedroom and heat some water. We can put him on my bed."

"The cot will be good enough for him I guess," replied Ralph shortly. "We'll tie him down to it."

Though Larry's foot was far from well, he was able to hobble about. His cot had been put back in the bedroom, and Margaret's bed set up again in the living-room. He and Ralph carried the

strange man through kitchen and hall, and laid him on the cot.

"The first thing to do," said Lawrence, "is to get these dirty rags off, and give him a bath. We can't have him around here in this state. There's plenty of hot water."

The two boys stripped off the ragged, filthy clothes, sponged the emaciated body with warm water, and managed to get a suit of clean underwear on the unconscious man. Luckily he did not seem to be frozen anywhere, though his swollen feet and hands gave evidence that he had suffered from former frost bite. Apparently he had not lain long in the snow.

Larry trimmed the long, ragged hair, cutting it as close as he could around the wound, which he cleansed carefully. Then Margaret brought a strip of soft cloth for a bandage. She did not explain where she got it. Probably it was torn from some part of her clothing.

"I might as well trim his beard," said Larry. "I don't pretend to be a barber, but he'll look more like a human being when I'm through with him anyway."

Clean, with his hair and beard trimmed, the man looked mild and innocent enough as he lay there unconscious.

"He has a rather well shaped head," said Lawrence. "Look at his forehead. His features are

good too. He's really not a bad looking chap now he's clean and trimmed. He doesn't look as if he needed to be tied down."

"If you had fought with him you would want to tie him. I'm in favor of putting the ropes on his wrists and ankles again, not tight enough to hurt of course, and then tying him around the waist to the cot. We mustn't take any risks with Margaret and Jack about."

After the boys had tied the man again, Margaret brought a cup of hot, strong tea, the only stimulant they had. His mouth was open a little, and Larry cautiously put part of a teaspoonful of tea between his teeth. The muscles of the throat contracted slightly, then relaxed again.

"He swallowed it," said Larry, and tried another spoonful.

Slowly and patiently, little by little, so as not to choke him, the boy fed him the cup of tea. He remained unconscious, the movement of the throat muscles seeming to be purely mechanical, but the beating of his heart grew stronger and more regular.

For about two hours he remained in that state, then Larry, who was watching him, saw his chest heave with a long breath, which escaped from his open lips with a sighing sound.

The boy hobbled to the door and called Margaret. "Bring that broth," he said. "I think he's coming to."

Margaret poured out a cupful of the squirrel meat broth, that was simmering on the kitchen stove, and Larry fed it to his patient a little at a time. The throat muscles worked more strongly and easily, and little, sighing sounds escaped the lips from time to time, but still the man did not open his eyes or move his body.

It was not until some time in the night that he gave any further signs of life. The boys had agreed to keep watch over him. He might come to, or he might die, at any moment, they thought. Ralph took first watch, but, it must be confessed, he had been dozing in his chair by the fire when he was aroused by a slight noise. Turning, he saw in the dim light of a shaded candle, a pair of wild eyes glaring at him from the cot. He sprang up and went to the injured man, to find him muttering and twisting about. Ralph laid his hand on the man's forehead. It was hot with fever.

For three nights and two days the fever lasted, the patient tossing and twisting as much as his bonds would permit, fighting against them sometimes, and muttering or crying out, or lying in a heavy stupor that could hardly be called sleep. During that time the three young people nursed their enemy as well and carefully as they could. Either Ralph or Larry was always with him, keeping ice wrapped in cloths on his forehead and wrists when the fever was high, giving him water whenever he seemed to want it.

and feeding him slowly, a spoonful at a time, the broths Meg prepared. Sometimes he would lie still to be fed, at others he would try to raise himself, snatch at the spoon with his teeth or struggle to loose his tied hands. Though he muttered and mumbled almost constantly, when the fever was worst, the watchers could not make out a complete sentence, and very few of the words were intelligible. What they did catch, however, led them to wonder about this man.

"There's something decidedly queer about him," said Lawrence, the second morning after they had brought him home. "I can't make him out. We've been thinking that he was some kind of a low down half-beast. He certainly looked and behaved like one, but now I'm not so sure. He has an intelligent head and face. We discovered that as soon as we washed him and trimmed his hair and beard. Several times when he has been rambling along he has said something, only a word or two perhaps, that didn't sound like an ignorant, low down sort of a chap. Last night I heard him say distinctly something about 'copper bearing conglomerate' and 'glacial drift.' Those are geological terms, and you wouldn't expect to hear them from any one but an educated man."

"Maybe," suggested Ralph, "he is a prospector, who has struck a rich mine somewhere around here. That might account for the way he hated us. He

may have thought we would get on to his secret."

"Perhaps," Lawrence replied. "I've thought of that myself. Last night I looked over those rags we took off him. They are disgustingly dirty, but they were good clothes once. I don't mean the kind of clothes a man wears in the city, but good outing clothes. The shirt is finer flannel than ours. His boots are in ribbons, but they're the kind that cost a good deal of money. He must have carried a watch, for this piece of gold chain was hanging to his shirt. It's been broken off you see. There wasn't much in his pockets. They are too ragged for things stay in. What I found doesn't look as if it belonged to a tramp though." He handed Ralph a fountain pen, an empty, silver, match case with an engraved monogram, and a worn and dirty envelope that held a first class steamer ticket from the southwestern end of the island to Duluth. The fact that it was from the other end of the island, instead of Smith Harbor, amazed the boys. "He has a gold ring with a small, dark colored cameo, on his left little finger," continued Larry, "and have you noticed his hands? They are rough and frost bitten and the nails are in bad condition, but they go with his head."

All these things aroused the young people's keenest curiosity, and they watched eagerly for their strange visitor to show some signs of returning intelligence. The third morning after they had taken him in,

Ralph discovered, when he approached the cot, that the patient seemed to be sleeping naturally, the lines of suffering smoothed from his haggard face, his breath coming quietly and easily. Ralph touched the white forehead. It was cool and moist.

The touch wakened the man. The fire and wildness quite gone from his large, brown eyes, he looked up at the boy. "A little water, please," he said in a weak voice.

Ralph held the cup to his lips, and put his hand under his head to support it. The man drained the cup, his head sank back on the pillow. "Thank you," he murmured, looking at Ralph with a little smile. Then he closed his eyes and went immediately to sleep.

Ralph hurried out to tell the others. "The fever's gone," he said, "and he seems to have come to his senses. He's the mildest mannered pirate you ever saw. He said 'please' when he asked for a drink, thanked me, and went to sleep again."

XXIX

THE MYSTERY SOLVED

THE strange man slept peacefully for several hours. Then he opened his eyes and looked about him with a bewildered expression. Lawrence was sitting by the window, putting a new cord in one of Jack's snowshoes. He rose immediately and went to the cot.

"Would you like something to eat?" he asked.

"Thank you, I believe I would," the patient answered weakly.

Larry went for some broth. When he returned, the man's face still wore the puzzled expression. He made a slight movement of his shoulders, then looked up at the boy questioningly.

"What," he said hesitatingly, "is the matter . . . with my hands." His manner of speech was that of a gentleman.

Larry flushed. Tying this mild mannered man seemed ridiculous. "You've been ill," the lad hastened to explain, "a high fever, and — and all that. We tied you because —" He paused, not knowing just how to continue.

"I was violent, was I? I've made you a good

deal of trouble, I'm afraid. I have a sort of dim remembrance —" The puzzled frown deepened.

"You mustn't try to talk," Larry put in, "or even think. You're too weak yet. Just let me feed you this broth. You'll feel better after you've had it. But I'll untie your hands first."

He took the rope from the man's wrists, sat down beside the cot, passed his arm behind his patient's head and fed him the broth.

"That's very good," the sick man said, when he had finished the last drop. "Did you make it yourself?"

"Oh no. Margaret made it. She's a good cook."

"A woman?" said the man softly. "I've fallen into good hands. I don't understand . . ."

"You mustn't worry about understanding, now," Larry replied. "Go to sleep again if you can."

The rest of that day the strange man showed no further curiosity as to himself or his surroundings. He slept peacefully, waking only long enough to take food. At first Ralph was opposed to removing the ropes, but, after he had given the patient his broth and had seen how quiet he was, he consented to untie his ankles and take away the rope that bound him to the cot. The man paid little attention to the untying of his bonds. He seemed to take for granted that they had been put there to keep him

from injuring himself when the fever was on him.

The next morning, however, when Ralph brought him his breakfast, the stranger said to him, "Would you mind telling me who you are and where I am?"

"Not at all," replied the boy promptly. "Eat your breakfast first and then I'll tell you." After the sick man had eaten, Ralph answered his questions. "I am Ralph Elliot," he said, "and the other fellow who has been looking after you is Lawrence Kingsley. My sister Margaret made the mush you've just been eating. As to where you are, this is the old lighthouse."

"The old lighthouse? Do you mean the abandoned lighthouse in the outer harbor on the north-east end of the island?"

Ralph nodded.

The man looked bewildered. "How did I get here?" he asked. "Did you find me in the bog and bring me here?"

"We found you, but not in any bog. You were lying in the snow just a little way from here."

"In the snow? How do you happen to be on the island so late? Are you fishermen?"

"No, we're castaways. We lost our way on Thunder Bay in a fog, drifted all night and reached this island. That was in October. We missed the last boat. It's a long story. It would tire you too much to listen to it now. We've been here ever since."

"The last boat?" The man was staring at him.
"What time of the year is it now?"

"To-day's the twenty-second of February, Washington's birthday."

The other raised his hand weakly and passed it over his forehead. "I can't understand," he said.
"How long have I been sick?"

"We picked you up four days ago."

"Four days? But where — where was I the rest of the time, the other four months?"

"What do you mean?" It was Ralph's turn to be amazed. "You have been around this end of the island for a long time, since before Christmas."

The sick man shook his head slowly. Then an astonishing idea flashed into Ralph's mind. He leaned forward and put his hand on his patient's arm. "Tell me," he said earnestly but quietly, "try to remember, who are you and where did you come from?"

"I had forgotten you didn't know. I am Robert Graham, an instructor in geology at Northern University. On October tenth I started from the southwest end of this Island to walk the length of it. I planned to spend a week or ten days on the trip, though it is only sixty or seventy miles. I wanted to do a little exploring and get a better idea of the geological formation of the central ridge. When I had gone about half way, I sprained my knee and could not continue. I camped for several days,

thinking my leg would get better, but my provisions were almost exhausted and I had no gun. So I was obliged to go on again. I had to go very slowly and rest often. When dark came I was worn out with the effort and the pain. The next morning my knee was stiff and badly swollen, but I managed to keep on. I hadn't gone far when I slipped and fell down a steep, rocky slope. I must have struck my head, and I suppose the blow knocked me unconscious. I remember coming to, with my head aching frightfully. I went on, I don't know how long, whether it was for hours or days. It isn't clear in my mind. In some way I got into a bog. I remember falling and lying there in the wet moss too exhausted to get up." He paused.

"Is that the last thing you remember?" Ralph was leaning forward eagerly.

The man frowned with the effort of trying to recollect. "Yes," he said finally, "that is the last thing I am sure of. There are vague remembrances, or were they dreams? I can't tell. They are all dim and shadowy and detached. I think they must be dreams, fever dreams."

"Don't try to recall them now. You're all tired out. Leave them till another day, and go to sleep. I shouldn't have let you talk so much. I'm a bad nurse."

"I *am* tired. We'll talk about it some other time." He closed his eyes exhaustedly.

As soon as the sick man was sleeping again, Ralph hurried away to tell Meg and Larry and Jack what he had discovered.

"I've solved the problem of our mild mannered wild man," he said. "He's been crazy, clear out of his head, for months. He can't remember anything since sometime in October, when he was over in the middle of the island."

When Ralph had told the story, Margaret and Lawrence agreed with him that he had found the true explanation of their visitor's strange behavior.

"It was falling on his head that caused his insanity," said Larry, "added to the exposure and starvation and other hardships I suppose. But how in the world has he lived all this time?"

"It's horrible to think of," exclaimed Meg. "The poor man, wandering around that way, out of his head and starving. Oh, Ralph, if we had left him to die!"

"You were right that time for sure, Meg," her brother replied gravely. "I'm mighty glad you insisted on bringing him home. I can't understand how he lived all those months though. It's no wonder he has behaved more like an animal than a man."

"That is just it," said Larry.. "He *has* been like an animal. He hasn't been responsible, but has just followed his instincts when he was hungry or

cold or sleepy. Like an animal, he's been shy and afraid, but ready to fight for food. Jacky, that was the best turn you ever did any one when you found the poor chap lying there in the snow."

But Jack, though much excited over the story, seemed a little disappointed. "I thought maybe he was a pirate," he said, "and I've always wanted to see a real pirate."

The sick man improved rapidly. The castaways' food supplies were not just what a nurse would have selected to feed a convalescent, but Margaret did her best, and Mr. Graham enjoyed everything she prepared and praised her cooking. It was evident that, aside from the cut on his head, his illness had been mainly the result of starvation. With good food he recovered strength quickly, and in a few days was able to be up and about.

His old clothes were nothing but rags, and Ralph went clear to the Thorsens' fishing camp to get him coat and trousers. Fortunately Meg had enough yarn left to knit him a pair of warm socks. The feet of his laced boots were completely worn out, but from the tops and a hare skin, which the boys scraped and cured as well as they could, he managed with Meg's help, to make a clumsy pair of moccasins. The moccasins Ralph and Larry used with their snowshoes had become unwearable also, and they decided to make them some hare skin ones. They

were queer looking things and the imperfectly cured skins had an unpleasant odor, but they were warm at least.

Whether from good food and care or because the second fall on his head had counteracted the effect of the first one, Mr. Graham seemed entirely cured of the mental trouble that had turned him temporarily into a wild animal. In his normal state he proved to be a pleasant, kindly, young man, and the Elliots and Lawrence soon took a warm liking to him and he to them.

Of his months of wandering and suffering he had no clear recollection, nothing but a vague sense of discomfort and misery and fear, such as might remain after a bad attack of nightmare, and a few disconnected and hazy impressions, like dreams vaguely recalled. He seemed to remember breaking into buildings and finding food. One of his clearest impressions was of a room with much food in it, where he had eaten greedily and had gathered up all he could carry. He recalled also looking through a window into a lighted room, and crouching over a fire in a fireplace and piling on wood till the flames scorched him. When he told of that recollection, the boys exchanged glances. They remembered the unlocked back door. Was that the way the cabin caught fire? He had vague impressions of climbing trees and eating dried berries and seeds

from cones, of taking fish from lines and of fighting with animals and men.

These recollections were all indistinct and hazy however, and it troubled him so much to recall them that the boys soon ceased to question him. It was better for him to forget them all. How he had managed to exist so long without starving or freezing will always remain a mystery to them.

From his disconnected memories it seemed likely that he had wandered over the whole northern end of the island, entering every building he could find a way into, in search of food, shelter and warmth. Between the time when he had fallen exhausted in the bog and the day when he smashed the lock on the fisherman's cabin door, he must have found some sources of supply, for he could hardly have existed all that time on seeds and berries. From the Thorsens' house he had evidently carried away a considerable quantity of food, enough to last him some time, but where he had secreted it or when he came to the end of it, he could not tell. The remains of a fire in the den under the trees in the swamp showed that he had not forgotten how to kindle a blaze to warm him and that he had been supplied with matches. There were plenty in Knut Thorsen's store-room, and doubtless he had helped himself to them. He had no recollection of cooking food however, and the boys knew that he had eaten the hare

raw. When Jack found him in the snow, he must have been near, if he had not quite reached, the end of his resources, for he was certainly close to starvation and freezing. His hands and feet gave evidence of having been frost bitten, but not seriously.

Even had they chosen to do so, the castaways could not have kept from their new companion the state of their food supplies. When he saw how little they had left, he looked grave, for he realized that their generous sharing with him might bring them close to starvation long before the arrival of the first boat. So he made every effort to regain his strength that he might help in providing food, and it was surprising how rapidly he gained.

From former visits there, Mr. Graham knew much about that end of the island, and could answer many of the young people's questions. When the boys described the hole Larry had fallen into, he agreed with them that it might be the pit of an old Indian mine. There were probably few of the pits left in their original state, he said, for white men had established mines on the island and had worked over the same ground where the Indians had once dug the copper. The richest ore had been exhausted rapidly, and the mines of the white men had been abandoned for many years. The old lighthouse dated back to the days of mining operations. After the light had been taken out, the place had remained

unused, except occasionally for a few weeks in the summer as a dwelling house.

The boys were much interested in what Mr. Graham had to tell of Indian mining. Of course the Indians did not work in the white man's way, he said, but simply dug off the top soil and then broke up the rock with heavy hammers. Their hammer heads, round bolders of heavy stone, had once been common around the old mining sites. The native miners did their work a little at a time, but their operations on that island must have extended over hundreds of years. Undoubtedly they understood how to use fire to soften the metal, so they could break and beat off portions. Fire marks had been found on the pit walls. The Indians never carried on steady operations of course. They merely came to the mines now and then and dug out a piece, to hammer into a knife or spearhead or some utensil or ornament, and they sometimes preserved queer shaped nuggets as charms. They believed such fetishes would bring them good luck.

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XXX

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

MARCH came without any signs of spring. It seemed as cold as ever, and only the fact that the snow sometimes melted and settled a little, under the stronger sun on bright days, gave any indication that warm weather was drawing nearer. The food question grew more serious every day. The castaways had been for a long time without vegetables, the canned goods, including the milk, were exhausted, the dried fruit and sugar, which they had used very sparingly, were almost gone. There was a little baking powder, but no yeast, so hoe-cakes, biscuits and pancakes, made without milk, had taken the place of bread. These things with dried peas, baked or made into soup, and fish and game when they could get any, were the young folks' fare, and the peas were nearly gone. One small piece of bacon Margaret was saving for an emergency. Could they hold out for a month or six weeks more? It did not seem possible that navigation to the island could be resumed before the middle of April.

There was no perceptible break in the cold weather until the fourteenth of March, when there

came a sudden change. That morning the wind was blowing from the southwest, and before the sun had been up long, water was running from the roof. All day and night the eaves dripped, and the next day, with a light wind directly in the south, was still warmer. It turned a little colder that night, but the following afternoon, when Ralph started out to fish, the weather was still mild, the wind southeast and the snow melting. It seemed like a genuine spring thaw.

Even the hope that spring might be at hand did not lighten the boy's heart that day. Things had been going very wrong. Just as Lawrence's foot seemed to be getting well, he had wrenched it trying to snowshoe, and that day it was badly swollen and inflamed again. What to do for it he did not know, and he was beginning to fear that, without a doctor's care soon, it would never get well. Neither Margaret nor Jack was feeling well, because of their diet Meg thought. Mr. Graham was strong enough now to help with the hunting and fishing, but for nearly a week they had not succeeded in getting even a squirrel, although they had been driven at last to set snares. For four days they had not caught a fish. The night before the wolves had returned, and had howled close to the house, keeping Ralph awake with anything but pleasant thoughts.

As the wet snow slumped under his snowshoes, he was wondering how much longer, if this thaw lasted,

it would be possible to fish at all. It would soon be unsafe to go out on the main lake, and there would come a time, he thought, when the ice in the harbor would be too honey-combed to hold him up, and yet there would not be open water enough to launch a boat. In a decidedly unhappy frame of mind, he made his way towards some holes he had cut the day before about a mile down the harbor.

For several hours he watched for a bite, but not one of the little flags fluttered. He tramped about, not daring to go far from the holes for fear of losing a fish. The sky had clouded over and the south-east wind, blowing across miles of sodden snow and ice, chilled him to the bone. His clumsy moccasins were wet through, and his mind was a prey to the gloomiest thoughts.

Suddenly an unexpected sound made him look around quickly. Some one had shouted. "Nonsense," he thought to himself. "I'm imagining things. It must have been the wind or a wolf."

Then he heard it again, a man's voice, not a wolf's. Still he would not believe his senses. "There isn't a man, except Larry and Mr. Graham, within forty miles, and Mr. Graham is over beyond the lighthouse hunting." He looked towards the tower. Not a living thing was in sight.

Again came the shout. Ralph turned and gazed down the harbor. In the distance, hazy from the melting snow, figures were moving, coming towards

him, a man, two men, and something else,— dogs, a team of dogs drawing a sled. What could it mean? Where did they come from? Was he seeing something that was not there? Had he gone crazy?

One of the men shouted again. Ralph started towards them, fishing lines and holes forgotten, his only thought that there were human beings. He had not gone far, however, when he stopped in doubt. What sort of men were those with the dog team? Trappers, Indians, tough characters, against whom he would have to be on his guard? He thought of Margaret and Jack, and wondered if this was a new peril approaching. The joy he had felt at the sight of human beings vanished as suddenly as it had come, and fear took its place. There were only two of the newcomers though. Whatever they were, he and Larry and Mr. Graham ought to be a match for them. At any rate, he must find out where they came from. So he went forward again.

As he drew nearer he was far from reassured. The man on ahead of the dogs was a villainous looking object, Indian or half-breed. The other one, with his cap pulled low and a several days' growth of beard, was not much more prepossessing. The latter shouted to him.

"Hello," he said. "Do you live around here somewhere?"

He did not speak like a half breed or a Scandina-

vian. His accent was that of an American and an educated man, Ralph thought, and something about his voice seemed strangely familiar. But the boy did not intend to answer the question until he had a better look at the questioner. As he drew closer, the dogs acted as if they would attack him, but the man ahead said something to them in a fierce voice and flourished a long whip, and they, evidently knowing their master, quieted down.

The other man repeated his question. "Do you live around here?" Then, as Ralph made no answer, "Don't you understand English?"

No wonder he thought that Ralph did not understand him, for the lad was staring stupidly. He was looking full into the man's face, and he was beginning to think he had really gone crazy or that the whole thing was a dream.

"Uncle Frank!" he gasped.

"Ralph!" It was not a dream. There was no mistaking the reality of the grip his uncle gave him. "Where in the world did you come from, boy?" His voice was husky with emotion. "The others, where are they?"

"Over there." Ralph pointed in the direction of the lighthouse. "Safe and all right. But where in the world did *you* come from, Uncle Frank?"

"The Canadian shore. It's a long story."

"And how did you find us?"

"Purely by accident, but I'll tell you about that

later. Take me to Margaret and Jack first." He turned towards the other man. "This is Michel Lamotte. If it hadn't been for him, I shouldn't be here."

The half-breed grinned and grunted a greeting, then unceremoniously ordered his dogs to "Moosh," and they all started towards the lighthouse. The dog driver stopped his team on the beach, and Ralph and his uncle went around to the door. It happened that the others, busy in the house, did not see them.

"I think," said the boy, "you'd better let me prepare Meg a little. She'll think she's gone crazy, just as I did."

So we went in first. Margaret was in the kitchen.

"I've good news, Meg," he cried.

She looked at him in surprise. "Didn't you get any fish?"

"No, I've something better than fish."

"A hare?"

"Better than hare. How would you like to have a visitor?"

"You must be crazy, Ralph. What do you mean?"

"I mean that we have a visitor, the one person in the world you want most to see." Without waiting for a reply, he turned and opened the door. "Here he is."

The next minute Meg was in Uncle Frank's arms,

laughing and crying at the same time, as he hugged her, while Jack was dancing around them, trying to get a chance to be hugged too. Lawrence, in the living-room, heard the racket, and hobbled across the passage to see what was the matter.

"It's Uncle Frank," Ralph shouted to him, as he paused amazed in the doorway. "This is Larry, Uncle Frank." And Uncle Frank freed one arm to shake hands with the bewildered Larry.

For a few minutes they all forgot Michel. When Ralph went to call him to come in and get warm and have something to eat, he found the half-breed feeding his dogs, keeping them in order with his long whip, while he distributed their meal of frozen fish.

Dr. Elliot was anxious to hear the castaways' story, and they were quite as eager to relate it. When they told of their mysterious enemy and how they had nursed him back to sanity, their uncle appeared much interested, and when Ralph mentioned Mr. Graham by name, Dr. Elliot leaned forward in his chair.

"What did you say his name was?" he demanded.

"Mr. Graham."

"Robert Graham?"

"Yes, do you know him?"

"He's the man I came here to look for. Every one in Fort William," he explained, "believes that you were drowned during that fog. There seemed

no other possible explanation of your disappearance. Lawrence has been sought and advertised for all over Canada, but no one now has any doubt that you all went down in the Bay. On my way to your home, before I knew of your coming to Fort William, I stopped at Northern University, where I used to teach. There I learned of the disappearance of Robert Graham, an old pupil and friend of mine. He had been staying at the southwestern end of the island, they told me, with another scientist, doing geological and biological investigating. The two had planned to walk the length of the island, but at the last minute, the other man changed his mind and took the boat home, leaving Graham to make the trip alone. Unfortunately his friends did not realize, until after navigation had closed, that he had really disappeared.

“While I was searching for some traces of you, I came across, by accident, the captain of a small, wooden freighter, who told me of seeing a flag of distress at the end of the long point. He had only a glimpse of it, as he ran closer to the point than he intended, in a severe wind and sleet storm early in December. Landing to investigate was an impossibility. He reached Fort William after a perilous trip, during which his boat was almost crushed by ice, and told his story. Navigation had closed, and no boats, either Canadian or American, had been reported missing, the crews of which could have

reached the island. So no attempt was made to investigate. The story stuck in my mind though, and I began to wonder if the signal had been raised by Graham and if he could still be alive. I resolved to find out, if I could possibly reach the island."

At that moment the door opened and Mr. Graham came in. He stopped on the threshold and stared at the group. "Hello, Graham," said Uncle Frank.

That night they heard the whole of Dr. Elliot's story. The party he had been with had gone down to Newfoundland in the autumn, intending to spend the winter there and go back north in the spring, but during the winter the leader of the expedition had been taken very ill. This misfortune upset the plans of the entire party, and Dr. Elliot had returned to the United States.

He had written to his niece and nephews several times, but had received no answers to his letters. Becoming worried about them, he went to the city where they had lived. There he found the ruins of their house. No one in the neighborhood knew anything about the Elliots, but an officer of the trust company that handled their small property, told him of their disappearance. The company had made inquiries and had learned that the young folk must have perished in the fog.

Dr. Elliot went at once to Fort William, but his investigations led to the same conclusion, that his

niece and nephews must have been drowned. It was there, however, that he received the hint that his friend Robert Graham might possibly be alive on the island, if he could have survived the winter. People tried to discourage him from attempting to cross to the island. He could not be sure that the ice was solid clear across, they said. Usually there was at least a channel of open water. Moreover the ice might turn soft any day. Uncle Frank was not to be daunted. He laid in some supplies, and looked about for a way to take them over. Luckily, at Port Arthur he came across Michel, a half-breed Cree from the Hudson Bay country, who had a good dog team. The Indian readily agreed to accompany him.

"We didn't start a minute too soon," said Dr. Elliot. "The sun, aided by these south winds, is softening the ice."

Beyond Thunder Cape they found open water, and had to turn back and go down along the shore half way to Grand Portage before they could get across. Even then they were obliged to make long circuits to avoid open places. Twice they jumped channels, and once swam a stretch of icy water, floating the sled across. Much of the ice was dangerously honey-combed, and in one place they nearly lost the whole outfit, when the sled went through. Because of such difficulties, it took them two days to go across, along the northwest shore of the island

and around the end. They had reached Smith Harbor the night before. That morning they had searched the harbor, discovering evidences that some one had been living there since the snow came. Then they had extended their search to the outer harbor.

That night Dr. Elliot and the others talked until late, and were so taken up with telling their adventures that they did not notice, until they were ready to go to bed, that rain was falling steadily.

"Spring seems to have really come at last," said Meg. But Uncle Frank looked grave, and the half-breed gave a grunt of disgust.

XXXI

ROBERT GRAHAM STARTS ON A PERILOUS TRIP

“**W**HAT do you think about crossing the Lake, Michel?” Dr. Elliot asked the Cree the next morning.

Michel shook his head. “Goin’ to be bad,” he said. “Dis rain make ice rotten.”

“You’re not going to go back and leave us, are you, Uncle Frank?” cried Meg in consternation.

“No,” he replied gravely, “of course not. I hoped when I started out that I might take Graham back to civilization, if I found him, but it is out of the question for us to go now. You and I, Ralph, might possibly make it, but it would be an insane thing for the rest of you to attempt. We’ll all have to stay here until the boats are running.”

“I goin’,” said the half-breed.

“You had better not risk it.”

“Try it,” insisted Michel. “If no get ’cross, come back.”

“I am going with you,” said Robert Graham quietly.

“You mustn’t try it.”

"On the contrary I think I must. As Michel says, if we can't make it, we can come back." He gave Dr. Elliot a significant look, picked up his old hat and went out. Uncle Frank followed him.

"You're crazy to attempt it, Graham," he said, when they were outside.

"I should be crazy if I didn't. You understand me, Doctor. These young people took me in when I was little better than a beast. They cared for me and shared everything with me, depriving themselves to feed me. The supplies you brought won't last long. It may be several weeks before a boat can reach here. I am another mouth to feed. If I can get across, there will be that much more for the rest. My leg doesn't trouble me at all now, and I am in really good condition again, thanks to the care I have had. So I'm going to try it, and you're not going to raise objections."

Dr. Elliot laid his hand on the younger man's shoulder. "No, Graham," he said, "I won't raise objections."

It had stopped raining and seemed to be turning colder, when Robert Graham and the Indian started on their perilous trip to the Canadian shore. The others went out to see them off. At the last moment Dr. Elliot pressed Mr. Graham's hand hard.

"God keep you, Bob," he said huskily.

"And all of you," the other replied.

After the dog train had started, Uncle Frank and

the young folk climbed the tower to take an observation. From the platform they could see away to the east and southeast great stretches of open water. That was not the direction Michel had taken, however, and they hoped that somewhere between the island and the northwest shore the ice might be continuous enough to make crossing possible. Mr. Graham, turning for a last look, saw them on the platform, and waved his ragged hat. He had declined the cap that Ralph had pressed upon him, but had consented to take a muffler. Dr. Elliot had brought some warm, extra clothing, but Graham had positively refused to take any of it. The others would need it more than he would, he said.

As that day passed and the next, and the adventurers did not return, the lighthouse dwellers knew that they must either have crossed safely or gone down in the icy waters.

"They would surely have turned back if it looked dangerous," said Margaret.

Dr. Elliot said nothing, but in his heart he felt certain that under no circumstances would Robert Graham come back to share their scanty store of food.

One of the first things Uncle Frank did was to look at Lawrence's injury. He bandaged the ankle tightly, and set himself to reduce the swelling and discoloration. Under his skilful care the foot began to improve immediately.

The next thing was to make a careful estimate of just how much they might use at each meal to make the food he had brought last through until the first of May. Relief might arrive before that time, but he did not think it safe to count on that. He found that the ration was altogether too small to keep them, unless generously supplemented with fish and fresh meat. Not knowing whether he would be able to get back again, even if he succeeded in crossing to the island, Dr. Elliot had brought all the supplies the sled could carry, but he had expected to have not more than three people to feed.

Having Uncle Frank with them seemed to change the whole aspect of things for the young people. He took command, and they were glad to turn over the responsibility and to obey orders. They felt an immense relief at having his knowledge and experience to rely on. Of course he consulted with them, and Ralph was proud of the confidence his uncle showed in his judgment, and of the way he treated him, not like a small boy, but like a man and a comrade.

Dr. Elliot devoted most of his days to fishing and hunting, and, for a time at least, was more successful than the boys had been. He showed them where to look for game, and taught them a number of devices for securing it. The second night after his arrival the wolves came close to the house again. He slipped out quietly with his gun. Only two of

the beasts were to be seen, and he succeeded in shooting one of them. After that the lighthouse dwellers heard no more howling.

Accompanied by Ralph, he made several trips into the interior of the island, where hares were more plentiful. On one of these expeditions, the two found signs of moose. One or more of the animals had stripped a grove of young birch and poplar trees of buds, twigs and a good part of the bark. Tracking them was impossible, as snow had fallen since their departure from the place, and had blotted out their trail. It was on that same trip that Ralph caught a glimpse of a slim-bodied, rat-headed, little animal, with glossy, brown fur, that his uncle said was a mink. Several times they found lynx tracks, but did not get a sight of the beasts themselves.

Spring came very slowly. The snow settled gradually, and at last the ice in the harbor began to soften. From the tower on clear days, the open water of the big lake could be seen, deep blue and dotted with floating ice. But most of the time fog and haze cut off the view in that direction. On the third of April there came a heavy rain. Just after they had gone to bed that night, the boys were startled by an explosion like the report of a gun. They could not imagine what it was, but Uncle Frank exclaimed, "The ice is cracking." Several times during the night sharp reports waked them.

In the morning, they could see, as they looked

down the harbor, channels of open water. A spell of warmer weather, with south winds and showers of rain and wet snow, soon made the ice unsafe. Necessity kept the boys and Dr. Elliot fishing as long as possible, though they caught very little. After Ralph had broken through once and plunged waist deep into the water before Uncle Frank could rescue him, and after the latter had been cut off from shore by a new crack and forced to make a dangerous jump to safety, they gave up the attempt.

Then came colder weather again, with north and west winds. Thin ice formed over many of the places that had been opened, and the temperature seemed to promise a return to real winter. But on the thirteenth another warmer spell set in, with a strong wind from the southeast, accompanied by gusts of rain and sleet.

Then the young people saw a sight worth seeing. The gale, blowing from the open lake, tore the softened ice to pieces and heaped it upon the shores. Above the wild roar of the wind, sounded the hoarse churning, grinding and pounding of the ice, varied by an occasional sharp crack or explosion. Great cakes were hurled up on the shore, churned together by the action of the wind and water, and piled high in a barricade that filled the beach between the two rocky promontories, and rose higher than the top of the bank. Down the harbor as far as they could see, the wind and waves set the ice in motion, split-

ting it into pieces, churning it to powder and piling the debris on the shore. It was a wonderful sight, and one the Elliots and Larry never will forget.

For two days and nights the wind blew. When the gale had blown itself out, the harbor was no longer a sheet of ice and sodden snow, but blue water again, with ice cakes, large and small, floating upon it, and great drifts of broken and pulverized ice heaped up on the points and on the shores that were open to the wind.

Dr. Elliot felt that the boat must come before long. They were all more than ready for relief. The rations to which they had been reduced were scanty indeed, and everyone longed for a hearty meal, and above all for something different. Larry said he would give all he possessed for a beefsteak, while Ralph yearned for a piece of cake or pie. They were all in fair physical shape though. Margaret, Ralph and Larry were thinner than usual, but hard and muscular, and the latter's foot and ankle were all right again, while Jack's sturdy frame made him look a different boy from the white, delicate, little fellow who had come to Superior less than a year before. All had grown in height and broadened in shoulders and chest, until their worn clothes were most uncomfortably small.

Every day they watched for the first steamer, which would probably bring the fishermen. A week passed, a week of raw weather, chilling winds and

much fog. Early spring on Lake Superior is not a pleasant season. During that time there came one bit of encouragement. Lawrence, climbing to the tower platform, caught sight, far off across the water, of a thin column of smoke, the smoke of a steamer. He called the rest, and they raced up the winding stairs, and watched that smoke as long as there was a sign of it visible. It was the first sure evidence that navigation was open.

XXXII

THE LIGHT IN THE TOWER

WHILE the harbor was still frozen over, Dr. Elliot had shot several hares on one of the outer islands. When the ice went out, the boys had put one of the flat bottomed rowboats from the fishing camp into the water, and one afternoon, a few days after they had seen the smoke column, he and Larry decided to try their luck again on that island.

They had not been gone very long when the wind began to come up, and, as the afternoon wore on, it blew harder and harder. Before sunset the open lake was covered with big waves, and the ice cakes were careering madly about.

"How in the world are Uncle Frank and Larry going to get back, I wonder," said Ralph to Meg, as they watched the waves. "I don't see how they can cross from that island in this gale."

"They didn't take anything to eat. What will they do?"

"Cook a hare if they get one. Trust Uncle Frank to manage some way. They'll probably turn up before long."

Darkness came, and the hunters did not return. The three Elliots ate their scanty meal, washed the dishes, and settled themselves in the living-room for the evening. But they were restless and uneasy, and were continually listening to the gale shrieking around the house and the waves thundering on the shore. There was no rain accompanying the wind, but the sky was overcast and the night intensely dark. About eight o'clock there came a lull in the wind.

"I believe it's going down," said Ralph.

"Maybe," suggested Margaret, "if the wind goes down they can get across yet to-night."

"Perhaps," he answered, "if the waves are not running too high."

"It's so dark though," she went on doubtfully, "they might lose their way and run on the rocks."

"If the lantern was still in the tower," Jack put in, "we might light it and show them the way."

"I wish it was there," exclaimed Meg. Then she had a bright idea. "Let's get out that old headlight from under the stairs," she said, "and put it in the tower. It will guide them if they try to cross."

"I don't believe they'll attempt it," Ralph replied.

"Let's light it anyway," she insisted. "It can't do any harm. They can see it from the island and know that we are thinking about them at least."

"I don't remember noticing whether it had any wick."

"We'll get it out and see," and she jumped up and started for the passageway. She was so much in earnest about the matter that the boys followed her.

They found that the old lamp had a wick, dry and hard, but still good for something. Meg washed the glass and cleaned the burner, while Ralph polished the reflector. There was only a little kerosene left, just enough to fill the lamp.

"Never mind if we do use it all," said Meg. "I filled the lamps and lantern to-day, and there's a whole box of candles."

They had some trouble lighting the dried wick, but when they succeeded in making it burn, the lamp gave a good, strong light. Ralph and Jack pulled off some boards on the side of the lamp room looking down the harbor. In the opening they set the headlight. The rest of the boarding protected it from the wind.

The wind had come up again, and struck the tower so hard Ralph could scarcely stand upright on the platform. He was sure that Uncle Frank would never try to cross in such a gale, but, as Margaret said, the light, if they happened to catch sight of it, might cheer them up a little.

The three went back to the living-room and tried to settle down, but even Jack was restless. It was past his bed time, but he begged to be allowed to sit up a little longer. After nine o'clock they heard the

kitchen door burst open, and, running out, found the two hunters, bruised, battered, wet to the waist and looking utterly exhausted.

"Did you see our light?" the three cried in chorus.

"Light? What light?"

"The light in the tower. Couldn't you see it from that island?" said Meg.

"Island? Where do you think we've been all this time?"

"But," Ralph exclaimed, "you went over to one of the islands. We watched you go."

Dr. Elliot explained that they had left the island just as the sun was going down. "We didn't succeed in finding a single hare," he said. "We wandered about for a couple of hours without even seeing a track. Coming out of the woods on the outer shore, we discovered that the lake was rough. We had noticed considerable wind in the tree tops, but we hadn't realized it was so bad. Of course we set out at once to cross the island, but, because of the wet snow and thick growth, it took us a long time.

"When we reached the boat, we found the waves rolling between us and home. To make the crossing worse the ice cakes were coming in from the open lake in veritable flotillas. I decided that the only chance for us was to go straight across the harbor, where the wind didn't have so much of a

sweep. Coming over to the point was out of the question.

“It was a dangerous crossing even then. We didn’t land, but turned and pulled up the harbor as close to the shore as we dared. We thought that when we came opposite the fishing camp we could cross safely, but it wasn’t so easy as it sounds. The wind kept carrying us in. We had to work for all we were worth to keep from being dashed on the shore. Then all of a sudden the wind whipped around from east to northeast, and almost swamped us. Larry had to bale as fast as he could, while I handled the oars. By that time it was getting dark and blowing harder than ever. Crossing was impossible. The wind carried us a mile or more beyond the fishing camp, before we managed to get across the harbor again.

“Then, when we came near shore, we ran into the ice in the darkness, and smashed the bow of the boat. We had to jump for safety, but fortunately landed on solid ice. We succeeded in saving what was left of the boat by pulling it up over the ice to the shore, not an easy thing to do in the darkness with a gale blowing.

“We were still a long way from home, and the wind was blowing harder and harder, bending the trees as if it would bring them down over our heads. The darkness was so pitchy we could not see where

we were going, and the battery in my pocket light had given out. We should have been lost a dozen times if we hadn't kept near shore, and why we didn't break some of our bones in our various tumbles I don't know. Once Larry went down into a snow filled gully and I had to pull him out."

The wanderers changed to some dry clothes, while Meg prepared supper for them. While they ate, Ralph looked after the stoves and made ready for night. Finding that more wood was needed, he started to go out to the woodpile.

As he opened the back door, he heard something that brought his heart into his mouth. Above the noise of the wind and the surf there sounded in his ears the hoarse whistle of a steamboat. He could hardly believe his senses, but the sound came again.

"Uncle Frank, Larry," he cried wildly, "the boat is coming." And he dashed out of the door.

The others had heard the whistle too, and Larry, leaving his supper, was at Ralph's heels in a moment. They had gone some distance before Dr. Elliot, with a lighted lantern, joined them. They hurried over the trail, among the trees which bent and creaked with the wind, Uncle Frank ahead. As they went out on the dock, the lights of the steamer were close at hand.

Dr. Elliot raised his lantern and swung it around his head, and the boat whistled in reply. In a few

moments she had drawn up to the dock, a little sheltered there from wind and waves.

Ralph had never been so excited in his life. He trembled all over, and his teeth chattered as if with a chill. Yet he could hardly believe that this was the long looked for steamer and not a dream. Afterwards he had only a vague remembrance of what happened when the boat came in, of men leaping out on the dock and surrounding the three, of Mr. Graham seizing him in a veritable bear hug, of a confusion of questions and answers, and of the Captain shaking him warmly by the hand.

"You put the light in the tower?" Ralph heard him ask. "Well, I guess maybe you saved us from an accident."

"The light!" exclaimed Uncle Frank. "I had forgotten all about it."

XXXIII

LINKED WITH THE WORLD AGAIN

THE fishermen, with wives and children, had arrived. The Elliots, in their gladness to see human beings, invited them all to the lighthouse, but the fishermen declined. They would soon be settled in their cabins, they said. Then the boys remembered that they had used up the woodpile, and had smashed one of the boats. They explained, promised to replace the boat and offered the men wood. The fishermen accepted the explanation very good-naturedly.

Because of the gale, the steamer would not start out until morning, the Captain said. Uncle Frank went on board with him, while Mr. Graham returned with Lawrence and Ralph to the house. It was nearly an hour before Dr. Elliot joined them, and in the meanwhile Mr. Graham had told the story of his trip across the ice. It had been a perilous journey. The sled and one dog had been lost, and both men had narrowly escaped drowning. As a result of several plunges into the icy water, after all his previous exposure and privation, Robert Graham

had reached shore more dead than alive. Michel had left him, suffering with a sharp attack of pneumonia, at a little settlement on the northwest shore.

"If I had not been so ill," he explained, "I might have brought relief to you before. When I was able to be up, they told me the boat for the island might come from Duluth any day, but I couldn't wait. I managed to reach Fort William, but before I could find any one to come for you, the regular boat arrived. Because of the danger of floating ice, the Captain held her there three days. When we left, in the middle of the afternoon, the wind was not so bad, but it came up rapidly, and the ice, driven by the gale, increased the peril of the trip and delayed us considerably. Your friends the Thorsens were not on board, and the ice prevented us from entering the middle harbor. The searchlight was out of order, and the Captain had to feel his way up this harbor in the darkness. Then we caught sight of your light. We were sure at once that you must have placed it in the old tower."

"What did the Captain mean by saying we had saved him from an accident?"

"When he saw the light he had not realized that he was so far up the harbor. In the darkness and wind even he, good pilot though he is, had lost his bearings a little. So he might easily have run on the rocks, had not the lamp warned him of his whereabouts."

"Then our light was of use," cried Meg. "How lucky we thought of it."

Mr. Graham smiled. "I don't suppose you realize," he said, "that what you did might have had less happy results. The old tower has been unused for many years. No pilot would expect to find a light there. Consequently the sight of one might easily confuse some steersman. He might take it for one of the regular lights, think he was out of his course, and come to grief."

"I never thought of that," Ralph exclaimed aghast. "I'll go and put out that light this minute."

When Dr. Elliot returned, he, too, spoke of the lamp, explaining that there were heavy penalties for lighting false lights to confuse mariners. The brother and sister gasped when they realized what they had done. Their uncle gave them some comfort, however. "Luckily," he said, "your light could be seen only from the harbor, where few boats come, and it wasn't a flashing light or a very strong one. So the danger of any one's taking it for one of the regular lights was slight. Still I think that you ought to understand that it was both an unwise and an unlawful thing to do. However," and he smiled, "the Captain says he won't give you away, so there won't be any fines to pay. There may be some for fishing or hunting out of season though. I don't know just what the laws are in

regard to such things. We can straighten that out when we get back to civilization."

Mr. Graham returned to the boat about midnight, and at a quarter to six the next morning the happy castaways went on board. The wind had shifted and gone down considerably, and the sky was clear.

After being so long in the woods, the young folk felt like strangers in a strange land when they reached the city of Duluth. The first night in a hotel they could not sleep because of the noise in the streets under their windows, and they found steam heated rooms altogether too warm for comfort, but the things they had to eat certainly tasted good.

Dr. Elliot, Lawrence and Mr. Graham sought out the fishermen with whose possessions the castaways had made so free, and paid them liberally for everything used. The Thorsen brothers were thoroughly good-natured about the matter. They explained that the two of them, Knut and Ole, and Knut's wife, had intended to stay in Smith Harbor all winter, as they had done once several years before, to trap fur-bearing animals and fish through the ice. So they had laid in most of their supplies early, before autumn storms and severe weather were to be expected. They were well supplied with everything they needed except gasoline for their launch, when they found that it would be necessary for them to re-

turn to Duluth to look after some business, select their traps, and buy a few other things that they wished to select in person. The regular steamer did not carry gasoline, but the fishing stations were supplied by a small boat that made occasional trips to the island. The young people had found only about a quart of gasoline at the camp, so it was evident that the oil boat had either failed to stop at the Thorsens', or, what was more likely, had put into the harbor before the castaways reached there, but, finding the fishermen gone, had taken for granted that they did not want any more oil.

Intending to go back to the island on the boat the young people had missed when they made their trip into the interior, the fishermen had been delayed for another week. They were on the steamer when, in the northeaster, she had run on a rock, had damaged her steering gear, and had been obliged to put into a little north shore port and then return to Duluth. Before the next boat day, Knut Thorsen had the misfortune to break his leg. The accident spoiled his plans, but his brother Ole determined to go without him, if he could find a partner to share the work and loneliness. Before he found a satisfactory companion he was offered work, at good pay, for the winter, and changed his mind. Obligated to go to work at once, he had no chance to return to Smith Harbor and bring away the supplies stored there.

The Thorsens did not worry about those supplies. Most of the things would keep until spring, and the loss from the freezing and spoiling of canned goods and vegetables would amount to scarcely more than the expense of transporting them back to Duluth. They were sincerely glad that their stores had saved the castaways' lives. The good God had surely been looking after them, said Mrs. Thorsen, with tears in her eyes. She positively refused to take any pay for the jelly and jam and canned blueberries she had put up and the young folk had eaten, though Larry pressed the money earnestly upon her.

Dr. Elliot also sought out the man who owned the cabin on the little island. This man and his wife and son were much interested in the castaways' experiences, and objected at first to taking any money from them. He finally consented, however to permit Dr. Elliot and Lawrence to pay for rebuilding the house. The man who owned the shack, where the boys had borrowed the rowboat, did not live in Duluth, but the steamer Captain knew him and promised to get the fishermen to take his boat from the outer harbor to Smith Harbor and to pay him the rental money Lawrence left for him.

After the inquiries had been completed and the debts paid, the party separated, Larry starting east to meet his guardian who was to return from Europe the first of May, and Mr. Graham going to Chicago where he had relatives. The Elliots went back to

their home city. It was with genuine regret that the good-byes were said, for warm and lasting friendships had grown up among them, friendships that would never be forgotten.

Dr. Elliot, who was a bachelor, had made up his mind that henceforth his niece and nephews should live with him. "You belong to me now," he said, "and I'm going to keep an eye on you. No more winters on deserted islands for you."

"I'm sure," replied Margaret, "that we never want another experience like that. We've all had adventure enough to last us the rest of our lives."



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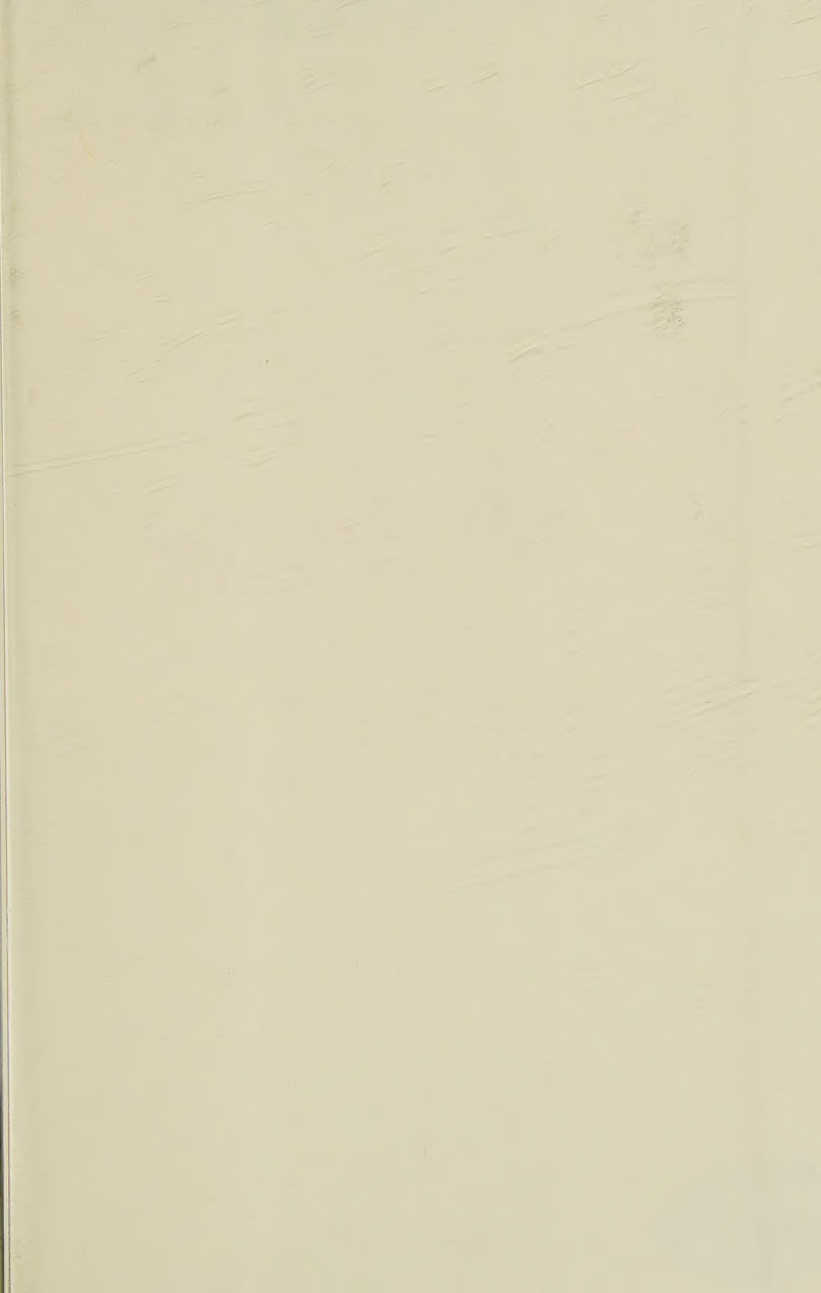
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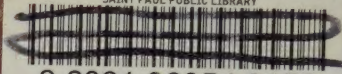
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